Society, Language, and Carnival in the Comedies of Ludovico Ariosto

by

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Abstract

Through a comprehensive analysis of Ludovico Ariosto’s comedies carried out in line with
Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of carnival and with a careful eye to the socio-historical context in
which Ariosto lived and worked, this dissertation brings to light several new reasons to explain
why these plays were so successful that they quickly replaced the production of ancient Roman
comedies in sixteenth-century Ferrara.

The first chapter reconstructs all recorded sixteenth-century performances and printings
of Ariosto’s plays. It then provides a summary of the plays and examines the stylistic and
structural changes Ariosto wrought to earlier versions of his plays. It also focuses on a
chronological survey of the critical fortunes of Ariosto’s comedies throughout the centuries.

The second chapter provides with a summary of Bakhtin’s theory of carnival. It then
identifies and defines the elements of carnivalesque subversion and grotesque realism in the
depiction of the relationship between servants and masters and in the interaction between the
marginalised and wealthy sectors of sixteenth-century Ferrarese society in Ariosto’s plays.
The third chapter examines the language in Ariosto’s plays by applying Bakhtin’s theory of billingsgate speech as a type of carnival subversion. The extensive use of abusive, insulting, and cursing words and indecent or obscene expressions in Ariosto’s plays suggests that Ariosto purposefully filled his plays with billingsgate speech in order to align them with the carnival spirit that was part of the temporal context of their première performances.

The close examination of Ariosto’s comedies through the prism of Bakhtin’s theory of carnival reveals that Ariosto purposefully enriched his plays with elements of carnivalesque subversion, grotesque realism, and billingsgate speech in an effort to free his plays from classical imitation and to mark a transition between two worlds, ancient Rome and sixteenth-century Ferrara. Most importantly, this analysis shows that Ariosto used his plays as a means not only to entertain his audience, but also to critique and reform contemporary Italian society. In so doing, this dissertation reveals the presence of a social commitment that, previously, had not been fully appreciated.
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This dissertation is dedicated to my close family.
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## CONCLUSION

## BIBLIOGRAPHY
Introduction

The meteoric rise of “learned” or “erudite” comedy in sixteenth-century Italy is firmly tied to the five plays by Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533)\(^1\) that were performed in Ferrara in 1508-1532. His first play *La Cassaria*, set in contemporary Italian but structured in line with classical Latin models, was staged at court in the palace of Duke Alfonso I d’Este (r. 1505-1534) during the carnival season of 1508. It immediately caught its audience’s attention because, though it resembled the ancient Roman comedies of Plautus and Terence, it also brought to the stage current social issues in Ferrarese society. Encouraged by the successful reception of his first play, Ariosto composed other plays along the same lines, namely *I Suppositori*, *I Studenti* (which he left incomplete), *Il Negromante*, and *La Lena*, all of which, except for the incomplete play which was never performed, were staged during carnival and very favourably received by their audiences.

The immediate success of Ariosto’s comedies confirmed his talents and reaffirmed his passion for the theatre. From his youth until his final years, Ariosto was firmly drawn to the stage and devoted both his time and his energies to the composition and production of dramatic works. His passion for drama might have derived from his early experiences with the theatre. Already as an eleven-year-old child he attended a performance of Plautus’s *Menaechmi* (1486) that was part of the revival of ancient Roman comedies underway in Ferrara at the time of Duke Ercole I d’Este (r. 1471-1505). This performance so delighted the young Ariosto that he began writing and staging his own short dramatic spectacles on the ground floor of his father’s house on the Via Giuoco del Pallone, directing his own brothers and sisters in the roles he had scripted for them. The young Ariosto soon composed his first full-length dramatic work, the *Tragedia di Tisbe*, a play in five acts in verse drawn from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (the manuscript of this work is now lost). In his youth, Ariosto also became directly involved in Ferrarese theatrical life,

\(^1\) Throughout his life Ariosto produced a significant number of literary works. Apart from his masterpiece, the epic poem *Orlando furioso*, Ariosto also composed Latin and Italian poetry that consists of odes, elegies, epithalamiums, sonnets, canzoni, epigrams, capi tolioni, and satires. Moreover, Ariosto also had a very active career in the service of the Este family serving them as a courtier, diplomat on embassies to popes, princes, and emperor, personal secretary to Cardinal Ippolito d’Este (1472-1520), and governor of the Garfagnana region.
actively participating in the production of ancient Roman comedies sponsored by Duke Ercole I d’Este. In August of 1493, as a nineteen-year-old youth, Ariosto was one of the twenty Ferrarese players who performed Plautus’s *Menaechmi* on tour in the duchy of Milan. Studying under the Augustinian prior and teacher Gregorio da Spoleto (1460-1502), who was a tutor to the young Este princes, Ariosto acquired a solid knowledge of the Latin poets. This, plus his early direct and indirect experience with the production of theatrical works, prepared him for his later composition of erudite comedies, a new genre of plays that met with such immediate success in early sixteenth-century Italy that it quickly replaced the production of ancient Roman comedies.

This dissertation seeks to understand what, in Ariosto’s comedies, made them so successful. While various critical theories could be used to approach this question, we rely on Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of carnivalesque subversion, so fruitfully applied by the Russian scholar to the works of another successful sixteenth-century author, François Rabelais (1494-1553). Though the genres used by the two authors are clearly quite different—drama for the first, narrative for the second—their intentions were very similar: to entertain and to critique.

This thesis consists of three chapters. The first prepares the basis for the comprehensive social-historical analysis of Ariosto’s five plays presented in the following two chapters. Ariosto composed five plays, but he also made significant and extensive revisions to four and left *I Studenti* incomplete. The first part of the chapter, therefore, reconstructs all recorded sixteenth-century performances and printings of each of Ariosto’s plays relying on the extant correspondence of Ariosto, courtiers, and ambassadors collected by Michele Catalano in his *Vita di Ludovico Ariosto*. It also provides a summary of the plays in order to facilitate comprehension of the analyses carried out in the following chapters; and it examines the stylistic and structural alterations each play underwent so as to highlight Ariosto’s intentions to free his works from the imitation of classical models and increase the elements of realism and carnivalesque subversion present in them.

The second part of the first chapter focuses on a chronological survey of the critical fortunes of Ariosto’s comedies starting from the sixteenth century and ending with current scholarship. This analysis points out the continual process of inquiry that feeds into and has inspired the present study. During Ariosto’s lifetime, his plays were staged several times in Ferrara and once in Rome and they met with immediate success. Ariosto’s contemporaries
praised and appreciated his talents for theatre not only when seeing live performances of these plays, but also when reading the scripts in printed editions available already during their author’s lifetime. Thanks to the availability of Ariosto’s plays in print, sixteenth-century theorists and scholars could examine them thoroughly, highlighting the strongest aspects in Ariosto’s dramatic oeuvre. In the second part of the sixteenth century, Ariosto’s plays were even recommended as models for dramatic compositions and, as such, penetrated into France and England where they were translated into the local languages. As models for dramatic compositions and/or as sources of ideas developed by subsequent playwrights, Ariosto’s plays influenced the development not only of Italian theatre, but also of French and English drama.

Despite the fact that in the sixteenth century the plays enjoyed considerable success and warm reception by audiences, scholars, and playwrights, the scarcity of scholarship on Ariosto’s plays and lack of evident records of their staging in the Seicento suggest that in that century they sank into oblivion. The new taste for the Commedia dell’arte and for opera must have diminished the public’s enthusiasm for erudite comedies in general, viewing them as an old-fashioned and passé art form.

The Settecento saw a renewed interest in Ariosto’s plays. In an attempt to establish a ‘history’ of Italian drama, eighteenth-century scholars examined Ariosto’s plays in relation to ancient Greek and Latin drama and compared them with other plays composed by Ariosto’s contemporaries. This led them to declare that Ariosto was one of the best and leading Italian playwrights of his time. The renewed interest in Ariosto’s dramatic works even inspired a restaging of one of his plays. Although the revival was not at all successful, the consequence of an evident misrepresentation of Ariosto’s original play, the effort still shows that after a century of oblivion Ariosto’s plays were not entirely forgotten.

Nineteenth-century Italian scholars, inspired by a growing sense of national identity, offered a fresh new look at Ariosto’s plays. While analyzing Ariosto’s contribution towards the development of national Italian drama, scholars and theorists focused their attention on highlighting historical aspects present in the comedies. Some scholars convincingly argued that Ariosto’s dramatic works substantially reflect tastes and customs of sixteenth-century society, while others believed that they lack realism and depict nothing but an imaginary world. Although
nineteenth-century scholarship presents both positive and negative views on Ariosto’s drama, it nonetheless demonstrates his significant impact on the development of a national Italian drama.

In the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries scholarship has shed new light on Ariosto’s plays. While searching for elements of realism portraying social conditions of sixteenth-century society, scholars have begun studying extant documents concerning not only these dramatic compositions, but also their author. In addition, they have discovered that Ariosto’s plays show some affinities with other literary texts, such as Boccaccio’s stories from the Decameron, that they contain elements of satire against corrupt members of society, and that they reflect vividly the world of medieval and Renaissance Italy, but not that of ancient Rome. Most scholars have come to a unanimous conclusion that Ariosto’s plays present a realistic representation of sixteenth-century Ferrarese life, customs, and mores that reveal immorality and vices of all sorts. None of these scholars, however, has examined Ariosto’s plays through the prism of carnivalesque subversion and grotesque realism in order to view his dramatic compositions as a means of reforming society while entertaining audiences.

Such an analysis is, in fact, carried out in the second and third chapters, which represent the most innovative aspect of this thesis. The second chapter begins with a summary of the theory of carnival introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), a Russian philosopher, semiotician, and literary scholar. In line with Bakhtin’s theory, this chapter identifies and defines three different types of folk humour and the concept of grotesque realism. These then are used as the basis for a comprehensive examination of the plays themselves, that aims to single out the carnivalesque subversions and elements of grotesque realism that are evidently and extensively displayed in the interaction between the servants and masters in the plays and in the interplay between the marginalised and wealthy sectors of sixteenth-century Ferrarese society. This novel approach to Ariosto’s dramatic works shows that while servants and the marginalised sectors of society transgress and undermine the hierarchical boundaries of the imposed order, they also display particular characteristics deriving from the carnival spirit and thus play a significant and indispensable role in the plays. The application of Bakhtin’s theory of carnival also helps to define the functions of carnival in Ariosto’s plays and this, in turn, allows us to propose that Ariosto purposefully seized an opportunity to reveal and critique human foibles and the rampant corruption of his own society while the spirit of carnival celebration temporarily suspended all hierarchical ranks, privileges, norms, and prohibitions.
The third chapter analyzes the language in Ariosto’s plays by applying Bakhtin’s theory of billingsgate speech as a type of carnival subversion. According to Bakhtin’s theory, the third distinct form of humorous popular culture consists of varieties of billingsgate speech such as abusive and insulting words, profanities and oaths, and indecent or obscene expressions. All these categories of billingsgate speech are examined in the first part of the chapter so as to prepare the ground for a more detailed analysis of billingsgate speech in the plays. This chapter also discusses the purposes and functions of seasonal festivals in Renaissance Italy and delineates the hierarchical structure of society, one that Ariosto masterfully depicts as a microcosm in his plays. The comprehensive examination of billingsgate speech in each of Ariosto’s plays, therefore, will highlight his intention to voice an important social critique and his attempt to reform society while suspending social-hierarchical boundaries.

The application of Bakhtin’s theory of carnival to an analysis of Ariosto’s plays thus enables us to identify a much more profound level of social critique in Ariosto’s plays than had ever before been noted. It proves that Ariosto’s plays offer much more than just a few elements of satire and a number of realistic representations of sixteenth-century Ferrarese life, customs, and mores. Although Ariosto composed his plays in line with classical canons and generously enriched them with elements from the medieval novella tradition and with references to current events and customs, his effective manipulation of carnivalesque subversion and his masterful use of billingsgate speech offer his audience not only a poignant portrayal of human foibles, vices, and immorality, but also serve as a link between two worlds, ancient Rome and sixteenth-century Ferrara. In so doing, Ariosto is able to entertain, critique, and reform his own society in a manner that makes him not only the leading dramatist of his time, but also a model for dramatists who were to follow him in later periods and across the continent.
Chapter 1

Ariosto’s Five Comedies and Their Reception

This chapter will set the stage for the detailed examination of Ludovico Ariosto’s five plays by providing basic information on the plays and reviewing previous scholarship on them. It will begin with a summary of the plays and an examination of their historical context in order to establish a basis for the more detailed analysis that will follow in subsequent chapters. It will then conclude with a survey of previous scholarship on the plays so as to highlight the continual process of inquiry that feeds into and has given rise to the present study.

a) The Five Comedies

(i) La Cassaria

Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533) composed his first comedy *La Cassaria* (*The Coffer*) at the request of Cardinal Ippolito I d’Este (1479-1520), brother of Alfonso d’Este (1476-1536), duke of Ferrara and Modena. The play was performed in a reception hall at the ducal palace in Ferrara on Monday, 5 March 1508, a day that fell during the carnival season. The hall had a rectangular shape and was spacious enough to accommodate hundreds of spectators in front of the stage. For this performance, the ducal painter Pellegrino da Udine (1467-1547) decorated the stage with a backdrop depicting a view in perspective of a small district with houses, churches, belfries, and gardens. The play was performed by amateur actors dressed in beautiful costumes. As the

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2 From 1493 to 31 December 1532, theatrical performances sponsored by the Este family were held in the ducal palace. Aside from the ducal family and the court, the audience at these performances also included the Ferrarese nobility and common people. See Catalano, *Vita di Ludovico Ariosto*, vol. 1, 301.

3 Catalano, *Vita di Ludovico Ariosto*, vol. 1, 302.
courtier Bernardino de’ Prosperi reports in a letter to Marchioness Isabella d’Este (1474-1539),\(^4\) between the five acts of the play there were intermezzi that included “dolce melodie de intermeci e de una morescha de cochi scaldati de vino cum pignate cinthe inanci, che batevano a tempo cum cane de legno del sono de la musicha del Cardinale.”\(^5\) And the play itself “dal principio al fine fo de tanta elegantia e de tanto piacere quanto alcun’altra che mai ne vedesse fare, e da ogni canto fo molto commendata.”\(^6\)

About two decades later, *La Cassaria* was mounted again in the great hall at the ducal palace on Sunday, 24 January 1529. A very brief account of that performance is found in a diary written by the duke’s chef, Christoforo di Messisbugo (d. 1548).\(^7\) As the record shows, the chef was mainly interested in describing the actual banquet that was given after *La Cassaria* but, nonetheless, his account is important because it is the only extant evidence of the second performance of *La Cassaria*. Messisbugo recalls the event as follows:

> Primieramente era adornata la Sala grande di Corte colle coltrine grandi di Ricamo et d’altre sorti magnificamente, dove innanzi la Cena si rappresentò una Comedia di M. Lodovico Ariosto, chiamata la Cassaria, la quale finita, ogn’uno se ne andò fuori della Sala et i più nobili si ridussero nella Camera del Cavallo et nella Stufà, dove s’intertenero con musiche et diversi ragionamenti, tanto che si apparecchiò la tavola in sala.\(^8\)

Accordingly, the play was performed as a pre-dinner event in the same great hall where dinner was to be served afterwards. It seems that there was not much scenery involved since the dinner

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\(^4\) Isabella d’Este was a sister of Duke Alfonso d’Este and Cardinal Ippolito I d’Este. She married Gian Francesco Gonzaga, the fourth Marquis of Mantua. After the death of her husband, Isabella ruled Mantua alone. She also patronized and promoted the arts.

\(^5\) “sweet melodies for interludes, and with a morris-dance of cooks heated with wine, with earthen pots tied in front of them, who beat time with their wooden sticks to the sound of the Cardinal’s music” See a copy of the letter of 8 March, 1508 written by Bernardino Prosperi to Isabella d’Este in Catalano, *Ariosto*, vol. 2, 83. In this chapter, the English translation will be provided for non Standard Italian. This English translation is by Edmund G. Gardner and is published in Gardner, *The King of Court Poets*, 323.

\(^6\) “from beginning to end was as elegant and as delightful as any other that I have ever seen played, and it was much commended on every side.” See Gardner, *The King of Court Poets*, 323.

\(^7\) For his accounts of banquets held at the court of Este, see Messisbugo, *Libro novo nel qval s’insegna il modo d’ordinar banchetti*, 1-123.

\(^8\) Catalano, *Vita di Ludovico Ariosto*, vol. 2, 302.
was served shortly after the performance. This play, therefore, was staged to entertain the Este family and its guests.

The play consists of a prologue in rhymed tercets and five acts in prose. In the prologue, the author announces that “Nova comedia v’appresento, / piena di vari giochi, che né mai latine / né greche lingue recitarno in scena.” Though most critics have pointed out that Ariosto freely imitated plays composed by the ancient Roman playwrights Plautus (ca. 254-184 B.C.) and Terence (185-159 B.C.), and especially the former’s *Aulularia* and *Mostellaria*, he, nonetheless, enriched this play with elements of realism reflecting current issues in sixteenth-century Ferrarese society. The play represents the lifestyle of well-to-do merchants and their servants, recurrent difficulties between disobedient young sons and their fathers or between untrustworthy servants and their masters, as well as the endemic corruption of ducal officials such as the city’s podestà. As a result, although the play is, in many ways, similar to Plautus’s *Aulularia* and *Mostellaria*, it also reflects Ariosto’s innovative refashioning of the ancient Roman model by bringing to the stage a number of contemporary sixteenth-century concerns and a subtle critique of current social problems.

The action of *La Cassaria* takes place in Mytilene, the principal city on the island of Lesbos. In Act I, as soon as his father, Crisobolo, leaves town, the young master Erofilo sends the servants to his friend’s house and orders them to stay there until he calls them back. While the servants walk towards the house, two of them, Nebbia and Gianda, disclose Erofilo’s secret. Apparently, Erofilo and his friend Caridoro are deeply in love with two young female slaves, Eulalia and Corisca, and they desperately need money to free their beloveds from the procurer Lucrano. Erofilo, therefore, asks his shrewd servant Volpino to design a scheme to free both young women.

In Act II, the servant Volpino reassures Erofilo and Caridoro that his plan will work and tells them to use Crisobolo’s clothes to dress Trappola, Volpino’s friend, as a wealthy merchant, then send him to take the coffer with gold brocade worth about two thousand ducats, stolen from

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Crisobolo’s room, to the procurer Lucrano, and to use it as a deposit for the purchase of Eulalia. Once Eulalia is bought, Trappola is to take her to a safe place, Lena’s house. After this, Erofilo will go to the city’s governor, Caridoro’s father, and tell him that the procurer Lucrano stole the coffer from his father’s room. Consequently, the procurer Lucrano will be taken to prison and the other slave, Corisca, will be freed.

In Act III, unforeseen events void Volpino’s scheme. While Trappola accompanies Eulalia to the assigned location, he unexpectedly runs into Erofilo’s five drunken servants. Suspecting that the girl is being kidnapped, the servants attack Trappola, beat him up, free Eulalia, and bring her to Chiroro de’ Nobili’s house. When Erofilo learns that his beloved has been taken away, he sets out in haste to look for her, leaving Volpino in charge of rescuing the coffer from the procurer. Meanwhile the procurer decides to steal the coffer and then flee Mytilene as quickly as possible.

In Act IV, other unexpected events unfold. Crisobolo, Erofilo’s father, returns home. To rescue the coffer, Volpino tells Crisobolo that the procurer Lucrano had stolen it from his room, and urges his old master to get the coffer back immediately, otherwise the procurer Lucrano will flee Mytilene at dawn with it. Upon returning home from the procurer’s house, Crisobolo finds Trappola wearing his clothes. Fearing that he might be punished, Trappola reveals Volpino’s scheme to Crisobolo. Meanwhile Fulcio, Caridoro’s servant, decides to free Corisca. He urges the procurer Lucrano to flee the city immediately otherwise he will be taken to prison by the governor’s men and will be hanged as a thief for having stolen his neighbour’s coffer.

In Act V, the servant Fulcio resolves the difficulties. He convinces the procurer Lucrano to seek refuge with Caridoro and free Corisca, persuades Erofilo to go home and apologize to his father for being an irresponsible and disobedient son, and manages to obtain one hundred ducats from Crisobolo to buy Eulalia from the procurer Lucrano. All the confusions are thus resolved and the comedy reaches a happy conclusion. The young women gain their freedom and are united with their beloveds, the irresponsible and disobedient sons learn their lessons, the servants are not punished, and the father recovers his coffer.\footnote{11 Ariosto, Commedie, 1-59.}
In 1530, twenty-two years after originally composing *La Cassaria*, Ariosto revised the play and its prologue. In the new prologue, he notes that the play had to be modified because the original version had become unrecognizable. Apparently, after the play’s première in 1508, a printer had obtained a copy of the script, made several changes to it, printed it without the author’s permission, and sold it on the market at bargain prices. Thus the unauthorized and mangled edition was circulating and misrepresenting the original play. To correct this, Ariosto decided to publish an authorized version but, unfortunately, the project did not succeed—Ariosto’s revised version was published both posthumously and much later, in 1546 by the Venetian printer Gabriele Giolito de’ Ferrari, which meant that in the first part of the sixteenth century the unauthorized and mangled prose version of the play enjoyed far greater distribution and more success than the author’s revised and authorized version.  

Ariosto’s revisions were, in fact, both extensive and significant. His first change was to recast the play in verse. This remodeling might have been motivated by his newly acquired taste for plays written in verse. Beginning in 1519, he composed three plays—*I Studenti* (*The Students*), *Il Negromante* (*The Necromancer*), and *La Lena* (*Lena*)—entirely in verse form using the unrhymed hendecasyllabic verse, an expressive line that closes with a dactyl, to echo the Latin iambic trimetre used by Plautus and Terence.

He then made significant changes in the content of both the prologue and the play. In the prologue, in addition to giving his reasons for the need to rewrite the play in verse, he described in great detail his own observations on growing old and its effects on older members of his society. Ariosto deplores that years go by very fast, that man’s physical appearance changes drastically with age, and that there is no remedy to stop the aging process:

... O dolce età! o memoria 
cruel! come quest’anni se ne volano! 
Di quelle io parlo, che ne lo increscevole 
quaranta sono entrate, e pur caminano 
tuttavia inanzi. O vita nostra labile!

Oh come passa, oh come in precipizio veggiamo la bellezza ire e la grazia!
Né modo ritroviàn che la ricuperi;
né per mettersi bianco, né per mettersi rosso, si farà mai che gli anni tornino;
né per lavorar acque, che distendano le pelli; né, se le tirassin gli argani,
si potrà già mai far che si nascondano le maledette crespe, che si affaldano il viso e il petto, e credo peggio facciano ne le parti anche che fuor non si mostrano.  

And yet, there are some old men who try to fight nature and, in so doing, appear ridiculous:

alcuni vecchi, più che ponno, d’essere belli e politi; e quanto si fa debole più loro il corpo (che saran decrepiti, se pochi pochi giorni ancora vivono), tanto più fresco e più ardito si sentono e più arrogante il libidinoso animo.
Hanno i discorsi, i pensieri medesimi, le medesime voglie, i desiderii medesimi, che ancor fanciulli avevano; così parlan d’amor, così si vantano di far gran fatti: non men si profumano, che si facesson mai; non meno sfoggiano con frappe e con ricami; e per nascondere l’età, dal mento e dal capo si svellono li peli bianchi: alcuni se li tingono; chi li fa neri, e chi biondi; ma vari e divisati in due o tre di ritornano: altri i capei canuti, altri il calvizio sotto il cuffiotto appiatta; altri con zazzare posticcie studia di mostrarsi giovene: altri il giorno due volte si fa radere.
Ma poco giova che l’età neghino, quando il viso li accusa, e mostra il numero de gli anni, a quelle pieghe che s’aggirano intorno gli occhi; a gli occhi che le fodere riversan di scarlatto, e sempre piangono; o alli denti, che crollano, o che mancano loro in gran parte, e forse mancherebbono

tutti, se con legami e con molt’opera
per forza in bocca non li ritenessino.
Che pagariano questi, se ’l medesimo
fosse lor fatto, che alla sua comedia
ha l’autor fatto?\textsuperscript{14}

These observations lengthened the prologue significantly but, at the same time, enriched the play with elements of realism touching on middle-aged men’s reaction to aging and the remedies used in the sixteenth century to conceal it.

The revisions to the play itself were equally significant. Ariosto changed the play’s setting from Mytilene in Lesbos to the city of Sibaris, a Greek colony in Magna Graecia, that is, from an island in the Aegean Sea to a city in peninsular Italy near the northern border of Calabria.\textsuperscript{15} Similarly, while in the first version Crisobolo was about to leave for Negroponte, one of the largest Aegean islands, in the revised play he is about to go to Procida, an island in the Gulf of Naples.\textsuperscript{16} Moreover, in the revised comedy the procurer Lucrano arrives in town not from Constantinople, but from Genoa, where he had successfully sold his merchandise and where he had learned that Sibaris would be the best place for him to ply his trade. With these significant changes to the play’s setting and context, Ariosto has the action take place not in a distant and exotic country across the sea, but in Italy itself and in a socio-cultural context that is much more familiar to his Ferrarese audience.

In line with the change in setting and context, Ariosto renamed some of the minor characters: Gianda, Corbacchio, Gallo, Marso, Volpino, Negro, and Morione became Corbo, Riccio, Nespolo, Gallo, Vulpino, Bruno, and Rosso and added a new character, the maid Stamma, thus increasing the cast from twenty-two to twenty-three. Stamma appears on stage only once, in Act III, 4, and her main task is to describe her master Lucrano as a stingy and greedy man who treats his servants badly. Though her appearance in this scene and her brief description of Lucrano do not contribute anything new to the argument of the play— in Act I the audience has been already informed about Lucrano’s cruelty and stinginess by Erofilo’s male

\textsuperscript{14} Ariosto, Opere minori, 195-196.
\textsuperscript{15} Ariosto, The Comedies, 264.
\textsuperscript{16} Ariosto, The Comedies, 264.
servants Nebbia and Corbo—the addition of a female servant criticizing her master reflects Ariosto’s intention to further ridicule masters by their subordinates. Without any doubt, a bold criticism directed at a master made by a female servant might have been unacceptable in sixteenth-century Ferrarese society, but during the carnival season this type of transgression was permissible because carnival was a temporary liberation from the established order and marked the suspension of all hierarchical ranks, privileges, norms, and prohibitions.  

Finally, Ariosto also revised some of the character’s speeches making them longer than they were in the prose play. In the longer speeches, Ariosto included additional observations on contemporary society. As an example, the procurer Lucrano expounds at length on his views on Sibarise society and its customs, criticizing both men and women from the local wealthy class for everything they do. Because Lucrano is an outsider who has visited different cities and countries prior to coming to Sibaris, his point of view is based on substantial experience and wide-ranging observations. Moreover, seeing that Lucrano is a representative of the lower sector of society—a pimp and an outsider—his social criticism reflects Ariosto’s intention to deride the faults of his society while the carnival season allowed it.

The revised version of La Cassaria was performed for the first time on Sunday, 19 February 1531, again at carnival time. It was staged in the new theatre that had been built in the ducal palace according to Ariosto’s own design. The following day, the courtier Girolamo da Sestula sent a letter to Isabella d’Este saying that the play was staged successfully and that the spectators were absorbed in watching the performance that lasted for four hours:

Al siru fu la comedia di m. Ludovigo la Chasaria fata: la sena vostra S. ria la sa, ma fu recitata tanto bene et è tanto bela che non è possibile adire meio et ala mia vita non sentì mai rezitare comedia con el più gran silencio di quela; maj fu sentì citire persona, imperò fu dato uno bando. Ma questa Chasaria non è la prima: la s’è longato e rifato e jonto quasi tuta, di modo ch’è durata ore 4. Ve so dire che la tocha le done e li zoveni di

17 Bakhtin, Rabelais and his World, 1-58.
18 This was a permanent theatre with a fixed stage and permanent sets depicting elaborate scenery. Before the construction of this theatre, plays in Ferrara were performed on a temporary stage, which had to be dismantled after each carnival. The permanent theatre was built in 1531 and its completion was celebrated with a performance of Plautus’s Captivi and Ariosto’s play in verse, La Cassaria. Though intended to be permanent, the theatre lasted only for two seasons. In 1533, the great hall of the Corte Vecchia together with the theatre was accidentally burned to ashes. See Beame and Sbrocchi in The Comedies, xxix-xxx.
corte e li vechi che vole piu esere zoveni e li s.\textsuperscript{re} che dano credito a uno solo e non fano conto de li altri e li offici. Io dicho che a mi pare non se li posi azonzere. Non se fe’ veniri l’altra comedia per non esere in ordine.\textsuperscript{19}

Da Sestula noted that the spectators watched the play in great silence obeying a special proclamation issued by the duke to ensure that the play be seen in a quiet atmosphere. It seems that the duke wished the audience to listen attentively to the characters’s speeches and to internalize Ariosto’s remarks concerning the problems of Ferrarese society, something that in previous occasions seems not to have been the case because the audience had not been as attentive and as well behaved. Although Da Sestula does not state explicitly that the audience enjoyed the performance, the duke must have enjoyed the revised play very much because it was repeated ten days later, on 29 February and then again a year later on 11 February 1532.\textsuperscript{20}

Considering the number of times Ariosto’s first comedy was staged during the carnival season, it seems obvious that the play met with great success. The prose play was mounted twice, in 1508 and in 1529, and the verse play was performed twice in 1531 and once in 1532. Because both versions of the play were mounted several times it suggests that Duke Alfonso I enjoyed them both.

(ii) \textit{I Suppositi}

One year after the first successful performance of \textit{La Cassaria}, Ariosto composed another play in prose, \textit{I Suppositi}, which was then staged in Ferrara on Tuesday, 6 February 1509, again during carnival. The play was mounted in the same reception hall of the ducal palace that had been used for the première performance of \textit{La Cassaria}, but on a new and much larger stage.

\textsuperscript{19} Catalano, \textit{Vita di Ludovico Ariosto}, vol. 2, 310. “On Sunday evening, was played Messer Lodovico’s comedy, the \textit{Cassaria}, the scene having been got ready. Your Ladyship knows it; but it was recited so well and so beautifully, that the delivery could not have been better. Never in my life have I heard a comedy recited in greater silence than this; not a single person was heard to make a sound, in consequence of the proclamation that was made. But the \textit{Cassaria} is not the first; it has been lengthened and almost entirely refashioned and added to, so that it lasted four hours. I can tell you that it touches the ladies and the young men of the Court, and the old men who wish still to be young, and the princes who believe one man alone and take no heed of the others, and the officials. I say that it seems to me that nothing can come near it.” Translation from Gardner, \textit{The King of Court Poets}, 343.

\textsuperscript{20} Catalano, \textit{Vita di Ludovico Ariosto}, vol. 1, 585-586.
Two days after the first performance, the courtier Bernardino Prosperi sent a letter to Isabella d’Este in which he reported that the play had been well staged and the audience greatly entertained. In his opinion, the play was entirely modern because it portrayed contemporary Ferrarese customs:

Marti sira il R.mo Car. fece la sua composta per D. Lud. Ariosto, Comedia in vero per moderna tuta deletevole e piena de moralità e parole e gesti de rederne assai cum triplice falacie o sia sottoposizione. Lo argumento fo recitato per lo Compositore e è belliss.mo e molto accomodato ali modi et costumi nostri, perché il caso accadete a Ferrara, secundo lui finge, come credo forse che V. S. ne habij noticia, e per questo non me extendo a narargelo altrimente. Li intermeci forono tutti canti et musica, et in fine de la comedía, Vulcano cum Ciclopi baterno saette a sono de piffare, battendo il tempo cum martelli e cum sonagli che tenivano ale gambe et facto questo atto de le saette col menare di mantici, feceno una morescha cum dicti martelli.

The play was revived ten years later on Sunday, 6 March 1519, again during carnival. This time it was staged in Rome in the apartments of Cardinal Innocenzo Cibo (1491-1550), the nephew of Pope Leo X (r. 1513-1521). The event was financed by the pope himself who gave his nephew a thousand ducats for it. Leo X also took an active part in the play, overseeing the admission of guests into the great hall and welcoming them individually with his benediction. Among the spectators there were cardinals, ambassadors, prelates, nobles, and common people.

The spectators took their seats in front of the stage that was hidden by a curtain with a painting on it representing the pope’s Dominican jester, Friar Mariano, sporting with devils. The

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21 Catalano, Vita di Ludovico Ariosto, vol. 1, 304.

“On Tuesday evening the most reverend Cardinal had his comedy represented, composed by Messer Lodovico Ariosto; an entirely modern comedy, all delightful, and full of moralities and words and deeds that raised great laughter, with three-fold deceptions or substitution of persons. The argument was recited by the composer himself, and the plot is capital and right well suited to our habits and fashions, for he represents the case as having happened in Ferrara. But I imagine that your Ladyship has heard about it, and therefore I will not tell it you again at length. The interludes were all songs and music, and, at the end of the comedy, Vulcan and the Cyclopes forged arrows to the sound of the pipes, beating time with their hammers and with little bells that they had at their legs; and while they forged the arrows and plied their bellows, they danced a morris-dance with the hammers.” Translation from Gardner, The King of Court Poets, 325-326.

23 Giovanni de’ Medici, was Lorenzo Il Magnifico’s son. At the age of thirteen, he became a cardinal; and at the age of thirty-seven, he was elected pope, assuming the name of Leo X. Cardinal Innocenzo Cibo had his own apartments in the Apostolic Palace, complete with a great hall that could fit about two thousand spectators and served mostly for the presentation of theatrical productions. Catalano, Vita di Ludovico Ariosto, vol. 1, 376.
painting was also accompanied by the inscription: ‘Questi sono li capreci di Fra Mariano’ (‘These are Friar Mariano’s follies’). At the start of the play, which was announced by music from some pipers, the curtain dropped to reveal a painting by Raphael (1483-1520), which served as a backdrop to the play, depicting the city of Ferrara in perspective. The stage was lit by ‘li candeleri, che erano formati in lettere, che ogni lettera substenea cinque torche et diceano: Leo X pon. Maximus,’ and the play was accompanied by musical interludes and ended with a morris dance that re-enacted the story of the Gorgon.

According to the detailed account of the Roman performance penned by the courtier and ducal ambassador Alfonso Paolucci, Leo X and the majority of people in the audience enjoyed the play immensely. The pope, for one, laughed heartily at the obscene allusions contained in the new prologue that Ariosto had composed for the occasion (but which, unfortunately, has not survived). Some Frenchmen, however, who were present at this performance, were disgusted by the obscene allusions and thought that they should not have been made in the presence of the pope.  

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25 See Alfonso Paolucci’s letter to the Duke Alfonso in Catalan, *Vita di Ludovico Ariosto*, vol. 2, 195-196. Alfonso Paolucci served as an ambassador at the court of Duke Alfonso and he was among the spectators. He left a vivid account of the proceedings and performance of the play in the letter: “Ill. mo et Ex. mo S. re mio Colen mo etc. Fui a la comedia Domenica sera et feceme intrare Mons. de Rangoni, dove N. S. con questi sua R. mi Car. li Gioveni in una anticamera de Cibo, et li pasegiava N. S. per lassar introdurre quella qualità de homini li parea, et intrati a quel numero volea sua S.14, se aviamo al loco de la comedie, dove il prefato N. S. se pose a la porta e senza strepito con la sua benedictione permesse intrare chi li parea et introsi ne la sala che da un lato era la sena et da l’altro era loco facto de gradi dal cielo de la sala sino quasi in tera, dove era la sedia del Pontifico: quale, di poi fermo intrati li seculari, intro et posesi sopra la sedia sua, quale era cinque gradi alta de terra, et lo sequitorno li R. mi con li ambasitori et da ogni lato de la sedia se poseno sicondo l’ordine loro. Et seduto il populo, che potea esser in numero de dua milla homini, sonandosi li pifari, si lassò cascare la tela, dove era pincto fra Mariano con alcuni diavoli che giugavano con esso da ogni lato de la tella, et poi in mezo de la tella si era un breve che dicea: - Questi sono li capreci de Fra Mariano. – Et sonandosi tutavia et il Papa mirando con el suo occhiale la sena, che era molto bela, de mano de Rafaele, et representavasi bene per mia fe’ Ferara de prospective, che molto fomo laudate, et mirando anchora el cielo che molto si representava belo, et poi li candeleri, che erano formati in lettere, che ogni lettera substenea cinque torche e diceano: Leo X pon. Maximus, sopragisonse el Nuncio in sena et recitò l’argomento in demos: che Ferara era venuta lie sotto fede de Cibo per non tenerisi de menor vaglia de Mantua, che era sta portata l’anno passato da S. mo M. in Portico; et bischizò sopra el titolo de la comedie che è de Suppositi, de tal modo che ’l Papa ne rise assai gagliardamente con li astanti et per quanto intendo se ni scandalizorno Francesi alquanto sopra quelli Suppositi. Se recitò la comedie et fu molto bene pronuntiata; et per ogni acto se li intermediò una musica de pifari, de cornamusi, de dui corneti, de viole et leuti, de l’organeto, che è tanto variato de voce, che donò al papa Mons. Ill. mo de bona memoria; et insieme vi era un fiauto et una voce che molto bene si commendò. ...”
In his 1509 prologue, Ariosto explains that he titled the play *I Suppositi* because it is full of substitutions and pretences similar to those that happen in real life when children are substituted for one another. He then adds that this comedy portrays a particular pretence, that is, when young men are substituted for old men. Ariosto then further explains that the substitution in his play is not similar to the substitutions depicted in the lascivious books of the Greek poetess Elephantis, or those imagined by Sophists in their contentious dialectics, but that this substitution, in fact, represents the exchange of a servant for a master and vice versa, just as was done in the *Eunuchus* by Plautus and in the *Captivi* by Terence. Ariosto purposefully adapts this type of substitution introduced by Plautus and Terence to demonstrate that he, in fact, imitates the classical sources not only in form, but also in content. Since both Plautus and Terence in composing their plays followed the ancient Greek playwrights Menander, Apollodorus, and others, Ariosto, too, imitates his predecessors:

Qui siamo per farvi spettatori d’una nuova comedy del medesimo autore di cui l’anno passato vedeste la *Cassaria* ancora. El nome è li *Suppositi*, perché di supposizioni è tutta piena. Che li fanciulli per l’adrieto sieno stati suppositi e sieno qualche volta oggidì, so che non pur ne le comedie, ma letto avete ne le istorie ancora; e forse è qui tra voi ch’l’ha in esperienza auto o almeno udito referire. Ma che li vecchi sieno da li gioveni suppositi, vi debbe per certo parere novo e strano; e pur li vecchi alcuna volta si suppongono similmente: il che vi fia ne la nuova fabula notissimo. Non pigliate, benigni auditori, questo supponere in mala parte: che bene in altra guisa si suppone che non lasciò ne li suoi lascivi libri Elefantide figurato; et in altri ancora che non s’hanno li contenziosi dialettici imaginato. Qui tra l’altre supposizioni el servo per lo libero, et el libero per lo servo si suppone. E vi confessa l’autore avere in questo e Plauto e Terenzio seguitato, de li quali l’un fece Cherea per Doro, e l’altro Filocrate per Tindaro, e Tindaro per Filocrate, l’uno ne lo *Eunuco*, l’altro ne li *Captivi*, supponersi: perché non solo ne li costumi, ma ne li argumenti ancora de le fabule vuole essere de li antichi e celebrati poeti, a tutta sua possanza, imitatore; e come essi Menandro e Appollodoro e li altri Greci ne le lor latine comedie seguitoro, egli così ne le sue vulgari i modi e processi de’ latini scrittori schifar non vuole. Come io vi dico, da lo *Eunuco* di Terenzio e da li *Captivi* di Plauto ha parte de lo argumento de li suoi *Suppositi* transunto, ma si modestamente però che Terenzio e Plauto medesimo, risapendolo, non l’arebbono a male, e di poetica imitazione, che di furto più tosto, lì darebbono nome. Se per questo è da esser condannato o no, al discreetissimo iudicium vostro se ne rimette; el quale vi prega bene non facciate, prima che tutta abbia la nuova fabula connosciuta, la quale di parte in parte per sé medesima si dichiara. E se quella

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26 Elephantis was a Greek poetess from the late 1st century B.C. who wrote amatory verse and pseudomedical works where various sexual postures and acts of sodomy were depicted. The Emperor Tiberius had these acts reproduced on the walls of his palace. See Ariosto, *The Comedies*, 96.
benigna udienza che all’altra sua vi degnaste donare, non negherete a questa, si confida non sia per satisfarvi meno. Dixi.\footnote{Ariosto, Commedie, 62.}

In the prologue, Ariosto confesses that he composed the play in imitation of Latin sources; however, he also confirms that his use of classical elements does not overshadow the innovations in his play. As he did in his first play he enriched his second play with elements of realism reflecting current issues in sixteenth-century Ferrarese society. The play thus depicts the lifestyle of well-to-do merchants and their servants, recurrent problems between disobedient young sons and daughters and their fathers or between untrustworthy servants and their masters. It does not, however, bring to the stage a critique of corrupt ducal officials, as the previous play had done. Another difference is that this second play, set in contemporary (as opposed to ancient) Italy does allude to recent events. For example, it touches on the consequences following the capture of Constantinople in 1453, when the Turks appeared as a constant, though remote, threat to the Italian states. This threat was made more immediate in 1480 when the Turks sailed from Valona in Albania to attack Otranto on the southern tip of the Italian peninsula. The city fell after a month-long siege, and suffered a terrible vengeance at the hands of its conquerors, who either massacred or enslaved nearly half its population. The following year, 1481, Sultan Mohammed II died and the Turks abandoned Otranto and their plan to conquer Italy. This historical event of Turkish barbarity left a long-lasting scar in the hearts of many in the Christian world and became a recurrent topic in sixteenth-century literature.\footnote{Ariosto, The Comedies, 96.} Ariosto referred to these historical events in Act V, 5, where Cleandro explains that when the Turks had invaded Otranto he lost his five-year-old son and was forced to abandon his home.\footnote{Ariosto, Commedie, 105-108.} The allusions to historical events in the play, therefore, make it appear modern to a sixteenth-century audience.

The plot of \textit{I Suppositi} follows the standard lines of classical and erudite comedy. In Act I, Polinesta, a young wealthy woman, shares a secret with her servant, Nutrice. Apparently, the servant Dulippo, with whom Polinesta has a tryst almost every night, is a noble young man from Catania in Sicily. His true name is Erostrato. He is the son of Filogono, one of the richest
merchants in Catania. In order to be with Polinesta, he exchanged his clothes, name, and status with his servant Dulippo and then managed to be hired as a servant in the household of Polinesta’s father, Damone. Meanwhile, the real servant Dulippo, who is now passing as Erostrato, attends university and profits from his studies. He also pretends to be in love with Polinesta so as to confound Cleandro, a well-known doctor of law in Ferrara, who intends to marry Polinesta. To block Cleandro’s plan, Erostrato (disguised as the servant Dulippo) asks his servant, for help.

In Act II, the servant Dulippo reveals his scheme to his master Erostrato. Accordingly, he (the servant Dulippo disguised as the wealthy youth Erostrato) will offer as large a wedding gift as Cleandro has already proffered. Then he will ask Damone to postpone announcing his decision about the marriage until he meets his father, Filogono, who is on his way to Ferrara to meet Damone to confirm and approve his son’s commitment. In addition, the servant Dulippo reassures his master (the real Erostrato) that the plan will work because he already has an elderly gentleman from Siena willing to pretend to be his father.

In Act III, however, something unforeseen happens that affects the smooth unfolding of the servant’s scheme. Damone accidentally discovers that for about two years his young daughter Polinesta has been having an affair with his servant Dulippo (Erostrato in disguise). He instantly orders his servant Dulippo to be bound and locks him in a dark room in the house. The distraught Damone now begins to blame himself for not having been a good and thoughtful father to his daughter and regrets that he did not marry her off earlier.

In Act IV, another unexpected event takes place. Filogono, Erostrato’s real father, arrives in Ferrara to visit his son, because he has not seen him for about two years. He goes to his son’s house and, to his surprise, finds a stranger passing himself off as Filogono and his servant Dulippo pretending to be his son Erostrato. Worried about his son’s safety, he immediately sets off to find him. To punish his servant Dulippo for concealing the truth and to confirm his son’s identity, Filogono hires the well-known doctor of law in Ferrara, Cleandro.

In Act V, while Filogono and Cleandro discuss the case, they discover that the servant Dulippo is, in fact, Cleandro’s own long-lost son. At the same time, the distraught Damone learns that his servant Dulippo (Erostrato in disguise) is the son of the wealthiest merchant in Catania, and is thus a very eligible young man for his daughter Polinesta. The plot’s
complications are thus resolved with a happy ending. Erostrato and Polinesta will marry, Cleandro is finally reunited with his long-lost son Dulippo, and Dulippo will not be punished for disobeying his old master, Filogono.  

Just as had been the case with La Cassaria, the prose version of I Suppositi was also published several times without Ariosto’s consent. The first unauthorized edition was produced shortly after the play’s première in Ferrara in 1509. Then, in 1524, another edition appeared in Rome that was based on a copy of the play prepared for performance in Rome in 1519. By the end of the sixteenth century, ten more editions were printed based on the 1524 edition. The various unauthorized editions suggest that there was a ready market for I Suppositi.

Once again, because these editions had been printed without his permission, Ariosto decided to prepare and publish an authorized version of the play. As he had done for La Cassaria, he again recast the prose play in verse and modified the prologue. In the original prologue, Ariosto had confessed that in composing his play he had intentionally imitated both the Eunuchus of Plautus and the Captivi of Terence, but in the revised prologue he decided to eliminate the references to the Latin poets and instead clarify the ambiguous meaning of the play’s title. It seems that by explaining the literal meaning of the title, Ariosto wished to discard its obscene allusions and clarify the intended meaning pertaining to an exchange of identities between a master and his servant.

Che talora i fanciulli si soppongano a nostra etade, e per adietro siano stati non meno più volte soppositi; oltre che voi l’abbiate ne le fabule

30 Ariosto, Commedie, 61-100.  
31 Ferroni, Ariosto, 55.  
32 The publishing house is unknown. See Ferroni, Ariosto, 55. There he provides the most updated information pertaining to the publication of I Suppositi. Ferroni writes that “I Suppositi, rappresentati nel carnevale del 1509, diedero subito luogo ad un’edizione clandestina, anch’essa sulla base di una copia fornita dall’Ariosto ai commediografi; una nuova edizione in miglior veste si ebbe a Roma nel 1524 (senza indicazione di tipografia), ricavata forse da una copia che l’autore aveva allestito per Leone X, alla cui corte la commedia era stata rappresentata nel carnevale 1519 in uno spettacolo di grande rilievo per la storia del teatro rinascimentale, con una prospettiva di Ferrara dipinta da Raffaello Sanzio. Sull’edizione del ’24 furono esemplate dieci successive stampe cinquecentesche.”  
33 There is no indication of the publishing house. See Ferroni, Ariosto, 55.
veduto, e letto ne l’antique istorie,
forse è qui alcuno che in esperienzia
l’ha avuto ancor. Ma che li vecchi siano
similmente da i gioveni supposti,
nuovo e strano vi dee parer certissima-
mente; e pur, anco i vecchi si soppongono.
Ma voi ridete? Oh, che cosa da ridere
avete da me udita? Ah, ch’io m’imagino
donde cotesto riso dee procedere.
Voi vi pensate che qualche sporcizia
vi voglia dire o farvene spettacolo:
che se veder voi vi aspettassi, o intendere
alcuna cosa di virtù, starebbonvi
più gli occhi bassi e più la bocca immobile,
che a savie spose, allora che si sentono
in publico lodar con bello esordio.
E questo mostra ben che non sete anime
sante; perché mai non veggiamo ridere
se non a quelle cose che dilettano.
Ma non sono io si indiscreto, che al minimo
uomo di voi pensassi, non che a un populo,
o dire o mostrare cosa reprensibile.
E bench’io parli con voi di supponere,
le mie supposizioni però simili
non sono a quelle antique, che Elefantide
in diversi atti e forme e modi vari
lasciò dipinte; e che poi rinovate si
sono a i di nostri in Roma santa, e fattesi
in carte belle, più che oneste, imprimere,
acciò che tutto il mondo n’abbia copia:
né son simili a quelle che i fantastichì
sofisti han ritrovate in dialettica.
Questa supposizion nostra significa
quel che in volgar si dice porre in cambio.
Io v’ho voluto esplicare il vocabolo
per torvi il pensar male, e farvi intendere
che non vi sete apposti. Or dal supponente
che qui faremo de’ vecchi e de’ giovani,
la commedia avrà nome li Suppositi;
la qual, se ascolterete con silenzio,
vi potrà dar col suo nuovo supponere
non disonestà materia da ridere.34

34 Ariosto, Opere minori, 317-318. In this chapter, all citations pertaining to Ariosto’s comedies are taken from Cesare Segre’s critical edition, Commedie, excluding those referring to La Cassaria, I Suppositi in verse, Il Negromante (first version) and I Studenti, because the Segre’s edition contains only La Cassaria (in prose), I
Considering also his graphic references to socio-economic status of men being substituted “el servo per lo libero et el libero per lo servo si suppone” (explicitly stated in the first prologue), it seems obvious that Ariosto wished to point to “supposition” rather than “suppository” present in the title, that is, to refer to an exchange of identities and hierarchical ranks that is not possible in real life, but can be permitted during the carnival season. Ariosto thus celebrated a temporary liberation from the established order and allowed the suspension of the hierarchical ranks, privileges, and norms within this play.

Although Ariosto recast the prose play into verse and clarified the meaning of the play’s title, the revised version of the play— unlike that of La Cassaria—was never performed. Like the revised La Cassaria, the revised version of I Suppositi was published posthumously and much later, by the Venetian printer Gabriele Giolito de’ Ferrari, this time in 1551. \(^{35}\)

(iii) Il Negromante

After having seen the 1519 performance of I Suppositi, Pope Leo X asked Ariosto to compose another play for the following year’s carnival. In response, Ariosto set himself to completing, Il Negromante, a play he had already begun composing in verse ten years earlier, in 1509, in the wake of the successful debut of I Suppositi. Eager to demonstrate his obedience and loyalty to Leo X, Ariosto finished the play in about three days. Although he was not pleased with the final work, Ariosto sent it immediately to Leo X together with a letter acknowledging his fear of the criticisms this play might arouse:

*Beatissime Pater.* Havendomi Galasso mio fratello a’ di passati fatto intendere che V. Santità haveria piacere ch’io le mandassi una mia comedia ch’io havea tra le mani, io, che già molti giorni l’havevo messa da parte quasi con animo di non finirla più, perché veramente non mi succedea secondo il desiderio mio, son stato alquanto in dubio s’io mi

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Suppositi (in pose), Il Negromante (revised), and La Lena. To examine La Cassaria, I Suppositi in verse, and I Studenti, Aldo Vallone’s critical edition, Opere minori, is used and Aldo Borlenghi’s Commedie for Il Negromante (first version).

\(^{35}\) Ferroni, Ariosto, 83.
dovea scusare di non l’havere finita e che per recitarla questo carnevale mi restava poco tempo di finirla (e questo pel timore del giudicio di questi homini dotti di Roma, e, più de gli altri, di quello di V. Santità, ché molto ben si conoscerà dove ella pecca, e non mi sarà admessà la excusa d’haverla fatta in fretta); o se pure io la dovea finire al meglio ch’io potea, e mandarla, e far buono animo, e conto che quello che conoscevo io nessun altro havesse a conoscere. Finalmente, parendomi troppo mancare dal mio debito, et essere ingrato alle obligationi grandissime che io ho a V. Santità, non satisfacendo a tutti li suoi cenni, anchora ch’io ne dovesse esser riputato di poco giudicio, perché forse la mia scusa, benché vera, non sarea accettata; ho voluto fare ogni opera per mandarla, e più presto esser imputato ignorante o poco diligente che disobediente et ingrato: e così l’ho ritolta subito in mano. E tanto ha in me potuto l’essermi stata da parte di V. Santità richiesta, che quello che in dieci anni, che già mi nacque il primo argomento, non ho potuto, ho poi in due giorni o tre condotto a fine: ma non che perhò mi satisfacci a punto, e che non ci siano de le parti che mi facciano tremare l’animo, pensando a qual giudicio la si debba appresentare. Pure, quale ella si sia, a V. Santità insieme con me medesimo dono. S’ella la giudicherà degna de la sua udienza, la mia comedia haverà miglior aventura ch’io non le spero; s’anco sarà riputata altrimente, prendasene quel trastullo almeno che de le compositioni del Boraballe già si soleva prendere, che, pur che in qualche modo la diletti, io me ne chiamerò satisfatto.36

In spite of the fact that Ariosto had fulfilled the pope’s request, his efforts were in vain because the following carnival *Il Negromante* was not staged. There is no extant evidence explaining why the pope decided against mounting the play. Beame and Sbrocchi suggest that Leo X might have disliked the play because it pokes fun at some aspects of the Catholic religion.

36 Ariosto wrote this letter to Leo X on 16 January 1520. See Ariosto, *Lettere di Ludovico Ariosto*, 49-50. “Most blessed Father. When my brother Galasso, some days ago, gave me to understand that your Holiness would like me to send you a comedy of mine that I have on my hands; I, seeing that for a long time I had put it aside, being almost disposed not to finish it, because verily it was not turning out as I desired, have been somewhat in doubt whether I should plead the excuse of not having finished it, and that there was little time left me to finish it for recitation at this Carnival (and this for fear of the judgment of these learned men of Rome, and, more than of the others, of that of your Holiness, for its defects will be right well perceived, nor will my excuse of having done it in haste be admitted); or whether I should finish it as best I could, and send it, trusting and reckoning that no one else would know what I knew. Finally, thinking that I should be too much wanting in my duty and ungrateful for the very great obligations that I have to your Holiness, if I did not satisfy all your wishes, even if I should be reputed of small judgment therefrom; because, perhaps, my excuse, though true, would not be accepted; I chose to do everything to send it, and rather be accused of ignorance or little diligence, than of disobedience and ingratitude; and so I at once took it in hand again. And so much has that fact of it being asked of me in the name of your Holiness wrought upon me, that I have now finished, in two or three days, what I could not do in ten years since the first idea of it came to me; but not, however, that it entirely satisfies me, or that there are not parts of it which make me tremble in the very soul, when I think to what criticism it is to be presented. Still, whatever it be, I give it to your Holiness together with myself. If you judge it worthy of your audience, my comedy will have better fortune than I hope for it; if, however, it be reckoned otherwise, you can at least take the same amusement in it as you were wont to get from the compositions of Baraballo; for, as long as in some way it pleases you, I shall consider myself contented.” Translation from Gardner, *The King of Court Poets*, 332-333.
(such as absolution and indulgences). In the prologue, Ariosto explains that Cremona—where the play is set—came to Rome to see and admire the celebrated reputation of the kindness, the candour of soul, the religion, the prudence, the supreme courtesy, the celebrated splendor, and the total virtue of Leo X, and not to be absolved of murders and broken vows, because she has no such need. Had she needed to be absolved, she would have expected the pope to send a plenary indulgence to her at home:

Né vi crediate già che la necessiti a venir, che si voglia di omicidii, di voti o di tal cose fare assolvere; perché non ha bisogno, e quando avuto lo avesse, aria sperato che il pontefice liberal le avrebbe l’indulgenzia fatta mandar fin a casa, plenaria: ma vien sol per conoscere in presenza, veder e contemplar con gli occhi propri quell che portato le ha fama celebre de la bontade, del candor de l’anima, de la religion, de la prudenzia, de l’alta cortesia, del splendor inclito, de la somma virtù di Leon decimo.

Ariosto’s comments on absolution and indulgences may be interpreted as a criticism of papal practice, but this does not seem to be a convincing reason to explain why Leo X decided against having the play staged. Most likely he had other reasons to cancel its performance. In the letter cited earlier, Ariosto stated that although he had managed to finish the play in almost three days, he nonetheless was not entirely satisfied with the final work. Considering Ariosto’s evaluation of his own work, it seems logical to assume that the play indeed had some weaknesses and needed to be revised. Leo X, therefore, might have disliked the play simply because it was not good enough.

Seeing that the play did not meet the pope’s expectations, Ariosto decided to revise it for a future performance. Ten years later, in 1529, the revised Il Negromante had its première in

37 Ariosto’s remarks against absolutions and indulgences might have disturbed the pope because Lutheran attacks on such practices were reaching a high point. See Ariosto, The Comedies, xxvii.
38 Ariosto, Commedie, 455.
Ferrara at carnival time. For this performance Ariosto altered the prologue replacing the references to ecclesiastical abuses with a satire of people who gather in piazzas to gossip about events that happen in distant countries while intentionally ignoring what is happening in their own city. Although Ariosto stays clear of criticizing the Church or religion, he does, nonetheless, direct his criticism at his fellow citizens and in so doing he focuses his audience’s attention on current issues of Ferrara.

To emphasize the play’s roots in contemporary reality, in both the original and revised prologues Ariosto reminds his audience about the carnival season and the fact that during this time of the year people disguise themselves by dressing up in costumes that others have worn before. He then explains that the Lombard city of Cremona may look like Ferrara because it wears the gown and the mask that Ferrara wore when *La Lena* was performed. Such references to carnival and to carnival disguises create an ambiguous meaning; that is, the audience may interpret the events as if they were happening in a Cremona disguised in the clothes of Ferrara, or they may view the events as if they were unfolding in Ferrara. In either case, whatever the spectators are about to see on stage will be relevant to the habits, customs, and mores of sixteenth-century Ferrarese society.

In both prologues, therefore, Ariosto displays a penchant for realism and a desire to free himself from classical models. He introduces issues pertinent to his own society and no longer pays homage to Latin poets, or justifies his imitation of Latin comedies as he had done in the prologues of *La Cassaria* and *I Suppositi*.

In addition to revising the prologue, Ariosto also revised the body of the play itself. One of the most significant changes is evident in the structure, with scenes in almost every act altered to provide a mere logical and consistent plot development. In Act I, scene 3 of the original play,

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39 In *Il Negromante* the action takes place in Cremona.
40 It is his other play which was performed before *Il Negromante* on the same stage in Ferrara.
Fisico tells Maximo that he wants to find out whether Cintio’s impotence is curable or not. To do that, Fisico will put a spirit with an intelligible voice into a cadaver and then the spirit will tell him the cause of Cintio’s impotence. Once this procedure is completed, Fisico will know what to do next. As it appears, the content of this scene neither introduces the predicaments nor offers a clever solution; it deals, instead, with the complication of incidents and thus it belongs to Act III, scene 4 where it can serve to introduce the complications of incidents in a more consistent manner.

A similar problem existed with Act II, scene 1 of the original play that depicted a conversation among Cintio, Temolo, and Cambio. In their discussion, they disclose Fisico’s superhuman abilities and the possible obstacles he might cause. This scene, therefore, describes predicaments and hindrances that usually give rise to further actions in a comedy. Ariosto thus moved this scene to Act I, 3 of the revised play to complete the description of hindrances introduced in the previous two scenes. In addition to rearranging these scenes, Ariosto also reduced other scenes by combining two or sometimes three scenes into one. All these re-orderings of scenes indicate that Ariosto was trying to adhere to the tripartite classical developmental structure of protasis, epitasis, and catastrophe that was an indispensable requirement for dramatic composition for Italian Renaissance dramatists. According to this structure, the dramatic action begins with the protasis, in which the predicament is stated and a solution is offered (Acts I and II); it is followed by the epitasis, in which unforeseen incidents complicate the situation and a new solution is improvised (Acts III and IV); and ends with the catastrophe or resolution of the entire situation (Act V).

Apart from restructuring the scenes, Ariosto also lengthened the play by introducing two major changes that make the argument of the play more complete and less complicated. He added three final scenes to Act V that bring Astrologo (Fisico in the original play) back on stage thus allowing the two servants Temolo and Nibbio to confront and punish him. In the original play, Astrologo appears for the last time in Act III and remains unpunished. By making him return in the final scenes of the final act, Ariosto gives the play a more complete dénouement and a greater sense of finality.

Ariosto also eliminated the double deception staged in the original play. A first stratagem, by which Cintio pretends to be impotent with his second wife Emilia, is left
untouched, but a second ruse, by which Cambio feigns to be Lavinia’s husband, is eliminated completely and replaced, instead, by the re-alignment of Cambio (the new Fazio) as Lavinia’s foster father. In so doing, Ariosto made the revised play less involved and less shocking in the eyes of its spectators since Lavinia is now portrayed as a victim of love and not as a victim of fraud.

Lastly, Ariosto modified the names of some characters, much as he had done in *La Cassaria*. He amended the spelling of the names, Nebbio, Margherita, and Maximo by changing them into Nibbio, Margarita, and Massimo, perhaps to reflect contemporary Ferrarese pronunciation of these names; and he replaced names such as Aurelia, Cambio, Madre, and Fisico with Nutrice, Fazio, Madonna, and Astrologo. It is not clear why Ariosto decided to replace the names, but it seems that he wished to highlight functions of these characters. For instance, the name Astrologo gives a hint on astrology. When Astrologo appears on stage, the audience immediately understands that this character is an astrologer rather than a doctor—the name Fisico means a Physician.

All these revisions to the structure and content of the play altered the work significantly. They help to portray the action more logically and render the revised play more complete. The play’s plot now unfolds more effectively and reflects better Ariosto’s intentions to make this play modern.

Similar to *La Cassaria* and *I Suppositi*, *Il Negromante* brings to the stage the lifestyle of well-to-do merchants and their servants, the recurrent problems between disobedient young sons and their fathers or between untrustworthy servants and their masters. Like them, it also recalls recent historical events that deeply affected European society in the early Cinquecento. For one, it touches on the consequences of the 1492 expulsion of Jews from Spain that saw a considerable number of exiled Jews settle in Italy, particularly in Ferrara and Venice. In this play, Astrologo is a necromancer and a swindler, but he is also an exiled Jew, and thus belongs to a foreign and marginalised sector of Ferrarese society. His presence in the play helps to increase the work’s carnivalesque spirit by providing a way to ridicule the wealthy merchants from the higher sector of Ferrarese society. As will be discussed in the following chapter, this type of transgression

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41 Ariosto, *The Comedies*, 158.
marks the suspension of all the hierarchical barriers that control the real life of people and celebrates a temporary liberation from the established order possible only during the carnival season. The revised play thus reflects Ariosto’s aim of composing a comedy in accordance with classical canons and at the same time endowing it with his innovations—elements of realism and carnivalesque subversions.

The plot of *Il Negromante* follows the standard lines of classical and erudite comedy. In Act I, the merchant Fazio confides a secret to his old friend Lippo. He secretly married his adopted daughter Lavinia to Cintio, who is also an adopted son of a very wealthy merchant. They conceal this marriage because they are afraid that Massimo, Cintio’s foster father, might disapprove of it. A couple of months later, having no knowledge of the clandestine marriage, Massimo marries Cintio to Emilia, daughter of the wealthiest merchant in the city. To dissolve his marriage with Emilia, Cintio pretends to be impotent. As a result, Massimo hires Astrologo (whose real name is Jachelino) who claims to possess superhuman abilities, to cure Cintio’s impotence. Fazio thus worries that Jachelino might disclose Cintio’s subterfuge.

In Act II, Jachelino counts his future profits. He tells his servant Nibbio that he will obtain two silver basins and fifty scudi from Massimo for curing Cintio’s impotence, some money from Cintio for concealing his pretence and helping him dissolve his marriage with Emilia, and fifty florins plus all the silver that Camillo Pocosale has at home for breaking up Emilia’s marriage with Cintio. Camillo is a rich young man who is madly in love with Emilia and desperately wants to marry her, but her father disapproves of such a match. Jachelino, therefore, devises a scheme to profit from his employers.

In Act III, Jachelino reveals his plan. He tells Cintio that a box with a man in it will be delivered to Emilia’s bedroom. To conceal the presence of the man in the box, he will warn people not to open the box for it contains spirits. Cintio will then go to the bedroom and discover Emilia with another man. She will, thus, be considered an adulteress and Cintio will have a legitimate excuse to dissolve the marriage. Jachelino also tells Camillo that he will place him in a box and take the box to Emilia’s bedroom. Once he is in Emilia’s room, Camillo will finally have a chance to be with his beloved Emilia. And then Jachelino will collect his payments from his employers and flee Cremona with his servant Nibbio.
In Act IV, Jachelino’s scheme fails. Believing that the box has miraculous powers that might affect the relationship between his master Cintio and Emilia, the servant Temolo blocks its delivery to Emilia’s bedroom. When he announces that Jachelino has been stabbed to death by an assassin, the servant Nibbio leaves the box unattended, which allows Temolo to tell the porter to deliver the box into Lavinia’s bedroom. While in the box in Lavinia’s room, Camillo realizes that Cintio and Lavinia are secretly married. He immediately gets out of the box and runs at breakneck speed to find Abondio, Emilia’s father, to inform him of this.

In Act V, Massimo recognizes in Lavinia his lost daughter Ippolita. Overwhelmed with joy, he beseeches Abondio to take back Emilia, who is still a virgin, and thus annul the marriage contract between Cintio and Emilia so as to marry Emilia with Camillo Pocosale. In the meantime, Temolo runs to the podestà to inform him about the swindler Jachelino, and the servant Nibbio betrays his master Jachelino by deciding not to flee with him. Thus the plot’s complication is resolved and the comedy reaches a happy conclusion. The lost daughter is reunited with her father and will no longer hide her marital status; Emilia and Camillo will be married; and, the swindler will flee the city to save his life.42

The revised version of *Il Negromante* was staged only once in the ducal palace in Ferrara in 1529. There is no extant record describing the performance or reception of the play. *Il Negromante* was not published during the author’s lifetime either in its original or revised version. The original version was published twice in 1535 by an unknown printer working in Venice and the revised version was published in 1551 by Gabriele Giolito de’ Ferrari in Venice and then reprinted several times throughout the sixteenth century.43

(iv) *I Studenti*

Sometime between 1518 and 1519, Ariosto began working on his next verse play, *I Studenti*, but left it incomplete at Act IV, 3. Even though the play is not finished, most critics consider it to be a polished segment and a precursor of Ariosto’s last play *La Lena*. They have suggested that the

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plot is well-developed into the *epitasis*\(^{44}\) and that the play portrays contemporary society more successfully than had been the case in Ariosto’s previous plays. This can be seen in the contemporary Italian setting, the frequent mentioning of contemporary cities, local towns, universities, villages, and the river Po. It is also evident in the several references to contemporary political events, such as the fighting around Pavia and Ludovico Sforza’s loss of his duchy. Moreover, many characters in the play seem to be drawn from and reflect real life characters rather than classical prototypes.

This, however, does not mean that the play is free from classical sources and inspiration. In spite of the fact that it realistically depicts contemporary society, it is still written in line with classical sources. The unfolding of the plot is enhanced with unexpected arrivals and the reliance on tricks and schemes that constitute essential features of classical plays. Furthermore, the servant Accursio’s scheme, in which he suggests that his master announce that the servants, Ippolita and Veronese, are the daughter and wife of Lazaro, is similar to the scheme depicted in Terence’s *Heautontimorumenos*.\(^{45}\)

The action of *I Studenti* takes place in Ferrara. In Act I, the young master Eurialo receives very shocking news from his servant Accursio—his beloved Ippolita and Veronese have unexpectedly arrived in Ferrara from Pavia. They are Lazaro’s servants, but had been thrown out of the house because their masters had found out about Ippolita’s affair with Eurialo. Because they have nowhere to go in Ferrara, Accursio advises Eurialo to allow the women to stay at his house while Eurialo’s father, Bartolo, is out of town. To conceal the women’s identities, Accursio also suggests that Eurialo pretend that the two women are Lazaro’s wife and daughter, Flamminia, and warns him not to disclose this news to his friend Claudio.

\(^{44}\) Italian Renaissance dramatists closely followed Donatus’s analysis of two classical principles that essentially became indispensable rules for dramatic composition: the five-act form and the unities of place, time, and action. In addition to those rules, they also used a tripartite thematic structure: “the dramatic action begins with the *protasis* or statement (Acts I and II) in which the predicament is described and a clever solution is offered; there follows the *epitasis* (Acts III and IV), the introduction of complicating incidents, in which the original plan is thwarted and a new scheme is improvised, leading to a *catastrophe* or resolution (Act V).” For a detailed discussion of Donatus’s analysis see Ariosto, *The Comedies*, xii.

In Act II, some of Eurialo’s servants ignore their master’s order and inform Claudio about the arrival of Lazaro’s wife and daughter and make him believe that Eurialo and Flamminia are deeply in love. This news distresses Claudio because he loves Flamminia and plans to marry her. Claudio had a nightly tryst with her while he resided in Lazaro’s house, but then one day when her parents became suspicious they threw him out of their house forcing him to leave Pavia. Claudio left the city, but asked his friend Eurialo to begin negotiations with Lazaro’s family for Flamminia’s hand in marriage. Believing that his beloved Flamminia and his best friend Eurialo betrayed him, Claudio decides to leave Ferrara forever and go back home to Verona.

In Act III, unforeseen events begin to complicate Eurialo’s pretence. Bartolo, Eurialo’s father, cancels his trip to Naples and is on his way home. A messenger from Lazaro’s family arrives in Ferrara in search of Ippolita and Veronese and reports that his master Lazaro, together with his wife and daughter Flamminia, will soon come to visit Bartolo. Realizing that he is in trouble, Eurialo asks his friend and neighbour Bonifazio, who is the same age as his father, for help. Bonifazio calms him down and promises to help.

In Act IV, Bonifazio tells Eurialo that he will pretend to be his father and will invite Lazaro, his wife, and daughter over to his house. Bonifazio thus hopes that this plan will conceal Eurialo’s subterfuge; and, in addition, help him arrange a marriage between Claudio and Flamminia. Soon after, Bonifazio meets with Lazaro’s family on the street and invites them to his house. At this point Ariosto’s play remains unfinished.⁴⁶

Had Ariosto been able to complete the play, it would have been staged during the carnival season in Ferrara. Apparently Ariosto postponed finishing the play because he simply did not have enough time to complete it. In one of his letters to Guidobaldo della Rovere (1514-1574), future duke of Urbino, Ariosto blames his other duties and services for taking too much of his time and preventing him from completing the play: “Gli è vero che già molt’anni ne principai un’altra, la quale io nomino I Studenti, ma per molte occupationi non l’ho mai finita.”⁴⁷ And yet,

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⁴⁶ Ariosto, Opere minori, 574-640.
⁴⁷ Ariosto, Lettere, 383-384.
despite its incompleteness, the play can still be seen as an important part of Ariosto’s theatrical oeuvre and will be used in the following chapters to analyze Ariosto’s writings for the stage.

The play was published posthumously in 1547 by Giovanni Griffio in Venice under the title of La Scolastica. In anticipation of its forthcoming publication and at the request of Duke Ercole II, the author’s brother, Gabriele Ariosto, completed I Studenti by composing a new prologue for it and the final act in verse. The author’s son, Virginio Ariosto, also wished to publish the play, but his attempts were in vain. Virginio composed a new prologue, completed the remaining act, but in prose, renamed the play L’Imperfetta, and then asked his cousin Giulio Guarini of Modena to versify the materials he had added, but Guarini refused. Virginio thus decided against publishing his version. Thanks to Virginio’s and Gabriele’s attempts to complete the play, Ariosto’s unfinished work has managed to survive to the present day.

(v) La Lena

Ariosto composed his last verse play, La Lena, for the carnival season of 1528. The play had its première in the ducal palace. For this occasion Francesco d’Este (1516-1578), the fifth son of Alfonso d’Este, recited a prologue and amateur actors (nobles and gentlemen of court) performed the play. In 1529, the play was re-staged, this time in celebration of the arrival in Ferrara of the newly-weds Ercole d’Este (1508-1559) and Renée of France (1510-1574), who were returning from France where they had been married. For this performance Ariosto composed a new prologue and enlarged the play by adding two scenes to the final act. This time Ariosto recited the prologue himself and once again amateur actors performed the play. Four years later, the play was revived a third time for the carnival of 1532. It was mounted in the permanent

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48 Ariosto, The Comedies, 320. The manuscript is extant in the Biblioteca Comunale Ariostea in Ferrara (MS CI 1). 
49 Catalano, Vita di Ludovico Ariosto, vol. 1, 590-591. Virginio’s manuscript can be consulted at the Biblioteca Comunale Ariostea in Ferrara, MS Magliabechiano VII, 6, 86. 
50 He was the eldest son of Alfonso d’Este (1476-1534) and Lucrezia Borgia (1480-1519). Ercole d’Este ruled as Duke of Ferrara and Modena from 1534 to 1559. 
51 She was the second daughter of King Louis XII of France and Anne of Brittany. 
52 Catalano, Vita di Ludovico Ariosto, vol. 1, 590.
theatre located in the great hall of the Corte Vecchia of the palace. As in Ariosto’s previous dramatic compositions, but more noticeably so, La Lena reflects Ariosto’s intention to compose a play that brought to the stage current social issues, as well as the customs and tastes of sixteenth-century Ferrarese society.

In the play, Ariosto finally frees himself from classical imitation. In both prologues, he no longer pays homage to classical sources as he had done in La Cassaria and I Suppositi, but expresses instead his opinion concerning the production of original comedies and the reception of innovations in them. In the first prologue, Ariosto acknowledges that the composition of original dramatic work is a very difficult task; he then states that even Latin dramatists such as Terence and Plautus produced very few new comedies, for they generally translated from, or adapted ancient Greek plays. Ariosto, therefore, expresses his amazement at the audacity of contemporary authors who try to surpass the Latin poets who, in his opinion, were more knowledgeable and skillful in the production of dramatic compositions than their sixteenth-century counterparts:

... Io che so quel che detto mi ha il mio maestro, che fra le poetiche invenzioni non è la più difficile, e che i poeti antiqui ne facevano poche di nuove, ma le traducevano da i Greci, e non fe’ alcuna Terenzio che trovasse egli; e nessuna o pochissime Plauto, di queste ch’oggi si leggono; non posso non maravigliarmi e ridere di questi nostri, che quel che non fecero gli antiqui loro, che molto più seppono di noi in questa e in ogni altra scienza, essi ardisca di far.

In the second prologue Ariosto invites his audience to see his new play. To demonstrate graphically the novelties present in the work, Ariosto draws the spectators’ attention to Lena’s new attire, a dress with a long train, that is, an enlarged play by the addition of two scenes in the

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53 See footnote 18 in this chapter.
54 Ariosto, Commedie, 116.
By referring to Lena’s new attire, Ariosto informs the audience that the play contains innovations that keep it up to date.

In the play, in fact, Ariosto portrays current issues, customs, and mores more vividly than he had done in his other plays. He specifically derides and ridicules human and moral corruption and makes extensive references to local places and people to create a relevant and recognizable context for his audience. As it appears, the most corrupt members of Ferrarese society are the ducal officials and servants. For instance, in Act II, 3 Corbolo tells his friend, who happens to be one of the duke’s servants, that he could not purchase any game at the market of Ferrara because there was none to be had. His friend responds by offering to sell Corbolo a pair of plump pheasants, which he will steal from the duke’s forest, for fifteen bolognini. Corbolo gladly accepts the offer. On his way to see Lena, he reflects on the duke’s decrees that prohibit serving pheasants at weddings and public banquets and is amazed that the ducal servants, who ideally are supposed to follow the decrees, in fact, violate them and steal from the duke’s forest.  

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55 Ariosto, *Commedie*, 118.
56 The punishment for stealing pheasants was truly cruel. According to Paolo Zerbinati, Ferrarese chronicler, on 22 January 1522 five peasants were publicly punished by cutting off noses and ears for stealing and selling pheasants. Zerbinati writes as follows: “Adì 22 detto fu tagliato il naso et ambedue l’orrechie scovati e bollati in tre luoghi nella
Furthermore, in Act V, 3, when Corbolo informs his master Illario that his son has been seized by Pacifico, Illario promptly decides to free his son with help from his friends. Corbolo, however, advises him not to threaten Pacifico since he may complain to the podestà. Because the podestà has the authority to increase the penalties based on the wealth of the accused and not on the seriousness of the offense, it would be inadvisable for Illario to take matters into his own hands for he might lose a lot of money just in paying bribes to the podestà, judge, and other administrative officials. While deriding and criticizing the duke’s officials, Corbolo informs the audience about the problems extant in Ferrarese society.

Ariosto depicts moral corruption throughout the original play, but in its revised form he emphasizes to a much greater extent its effects and consequences. While in the original play the final scene of Act V presents a happy ending—the young lovers will be married, the servants will not be punished for playing jokes on their masters, and the procuress Lena will look for another lover to support her family—in the revised version the final act confirms that Lena’s degrading condition will remain the same as it was at the beginning of the comedy. In Act V, 11, Pacifico reproves Lena for her salacious dealings, that is, for being a pimp for Fazio’s daughter; Lena responds by reprimanding Pacifico for forcing her to prostitute herself in order to provide for their family. By blaming each other for their miserable condition, Pacifico and Lena demonstrate not only their own, but also their society’s moral corruption. Moreover, in Act V, 12, Fazio’s maid Menica informs Lena that Fazio is reconciled with Lena and still loves her. He officially invites Lena and her husband to the wedding of Licinia and Flavio and expects them to attend it. Although she submissively accepts the invitation, Lena feels defeated because her rebellious actions have ended in failure. Consequently, she will continue her affair with Fazio and will remain with her husband in Fazio’s small house. Despite her rebellious character, Lena is powerless to change her life and incapable of fighting against rampant moral corruption.

In this play, Ariosto also makes extensive references to local places such as Gorgadello, a tavern on the street by the same name; the Banco dei Sabbioni, one of Ferrara’s leading lending...
institutions; the neighbourhoods of the Paradiso and of the Gambaro that contained a number of bawdy houses; and, the market place near the ducal palace. In addition, Ariosto alludes to local people who apparently were known to most Ferrarese such as Sabbatino and Mariano, two notorious drunkards who worked at the Este court;\textsuperscript{57} and Santino, the Este court dwarf from 1512 to 1519. The references to local places and people render the comedy more contemporary for its viewers and distance it further from classical sources.

The action of \textit{La Lena} takes place in Ferrara. In Act I, the young master Flavio entrusts a secret to his servant Corbolo. Flavio tells him that he urgently needs twenty-five florins to pay for a tryst with his beloved Licinia arranged by theprocress Lena. Because it is impossible to find any money right away, Flavio and Corbolo decide to ask Lena to allow them to postpone the payment. After a long debate over the money in which she refuses to wait any longer for her payment, Lena tells Flavio to pawn his clothes and pay for the tryst with that revenue. Flavio accepts the suggestion, takes off his gown and cap and gives them to Corbolo, instructing him to bring the clothes to Giulio, Flavio’s friend, and then borrow the money against them. Believing that Corbolo would obtain the money quickly, Lena lets Flavio into her house to wait until Corbolo brings the promised money.

In Act II, Lena meets with her lover Fazio, Licinia’s father, and quarrels with him over her salary in the hope that he will pay her more for her work, that is, for her teaching his daughter and pleasing him sexually. Upon hearing Lena’s complaints, Fazio becomes enraged and decides to punish her. He immediately announces that he wants to sell the house where she and her husband Pacifico currently reside and warns her to be ready to move out soon. As soon as Fazio leaves Lena’s house, Corbolo brings her a capon, pheasants, bread, wine, and cheese, but not the twenty-five florins she wanted. Lena gladly accepts the foodstuffs, but still refuses to let Flavio see his beloved Licinia.

In Act III, Corbolo tries to obtain the money from Illario, Flavio’s father. He tells Illario that the previous evening when his son was walking home, four men with clubs met and threatened to beat Flavio up. Flavio managed to escape, but he had to throw off his gown and cap in order to run faster. As a result, Flavio is now embarrassed to come home without his proper

\textsuperscript{57} Catalano, \textit{Vita di Ludovico Ariosto}, vol. 1, 494-495.
clothes. Happy to learn that his son is alive and unharmed, Illario decides to give Corbolo the money Flavio needs to purchase new clothes. At this point, however, and quite unexpectedly Giulio’s servant comes along with Flavio’s clothes, and this exposes Corbolo’s lie. Illario naturally becomes furious and refuses to give Corbolo any money for Flavio. In the process, Corbolo overhears that a buyer from Modena is on his way to inspect the house where Lena and Pacifico reside and where Flavio waits for his tryst with Licinia. The unexpected arrival of a buyer for the house leads Corbolo and Pacifico to hide Flavio in a wine barrel that had been lent to Pacifico by Giuliano.

In Act IV, while Flavio sits inside the wine barrel, Giuliano arrives to take the barrel away. At the same time, Bartolo arrives with a group of policemen in order to confiscate Pacifico’s belongings as partial payment of his debts. Since Pacifico does not own anything, Bartolo decides to take the barrel as part of payment of Pacifico’s debts. Giuliano, the rightful owner of the barrel, interjects and declares that the barrel belongs to him and not to Pacifico. As Bartolo and Giuliano argue over the barrel, Fazio interrupts them by offering to keep the barrel in his house until the question of ownership is resolved. They accept Fazio’s offer and roll the barrel with Flavio in it into Fazio’s house.

In Act V, Corbolo devises a new scheme in order to obtain money from Illario. He now tells the old man that Flavio is in danger of being killed by the enraged Pacifico because he caught Flavio committing adultery with Lena. To save his life, Flavio promised to pay twenty-five florins and took refuge in Fazio’s house. Believing that Fazio might help to resolve the complication, Illario discloses the whole story to him. Fazio, however, becomes angry with Flavio for having an affair with Lena. Finally when Fazio arrives home and learns that Flavio had actually been intimate with Licinia and not with Lena, he demands that Flavio marry Licinia. At this point, all complications in this play are resolved with a happy ending: Flavio and Licinia will be married, the servant Corbolo will not be punished for playing tricks on his old master, and Lena and Pacifico will continue to reside in Fazio’s house.  

In this last play, Ariosto clearly brings much more extensively to the stage elements of contemporary reality in both prologues and versions of the play than he had in his other dramatic

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58 Ariosto, Commedie, 115-182.
compositions. He explicitly depicts and critiques the rampant corruption present in sixteenth-century Ferrarese society. Considering the fact that the play was mounted two times for the carnival season of 1528 and 1532 and once more in the celebration for the arrival of the newlyweds, Ercole d’Este and Renée of France, it seems reasonable to assume that the play was received well in spite of Ariosto’s social criticism.

Despite its successful reception, this play was not published during Ariosto’s lifetime. La Lena was first published posthumously by an unknown printer in Venice in 1535. It was then published in 1551 by Gabriele Giolito de’ Ferrari in Venice.

The close analysis of Ariosto’s plays and of their context demonstrates that he composed his works in accordance with classical canons, but also introduced some significant innovations in them. In the first two plays, La Cassaria and I Suppositi, he intentionally imitated classical comedies and made extensive references to their authors, Plautus and Terence, while in his other plays, Il Negromante, I Studenti, and La Lena, he demonstrated more authorial freedom and less dependence on classical models. Structurally, all of Ariosto’s plays are based on classical models and are divided into five acts, with a clear division into protasis, epitasis, and catastrophe; they respect the three unities of action, time, and place; and they present classical comic devices and effects such as substitutions or exchange of identity, unexpected arrivals, and the use of trickery and ruse. To emancipate his dramatic compositions from close imitation of classical sources, Ariosto introduced elements of contemporary life and social issues. All his plays bring to the stage the life of well-to-do merchants and their servants, recurrent problems between disobedient young sons and daughters and their fathers, or between untrustworthy servants and their masters. Furthermore, Ariosto inserted into his plays allusions to recent historical and political events that affected the lives of his society. The close examination of Ariosto’s plays has thus provided a basis for a more detailed analysis of Ariosto’s most significant innovation, his introduction of the carnivalesque elements of subversion that will be examined in the following chapters.

b) The Reception of Ariosto’s Comedies Through the Centuries

(i) Ariosto’s Plays in the XVI Century

Ariosto composed five plays, including the incomplete version of I Studenti, and four of them were staged successfully during his lifetime. La Cassaria in prose was performed twice in 1508
and 1529; the verse play was staged twice in 1531 and one more time in 1532. His next play *I Suppositi* in prose was mounted in 1509 and in 1519. The verse version of the play was never introduced on stage. *Il Negromante* was staged only once in 1529 and his last play, *La Lena*, was mounted three times in 1528, 1529, and 1532. Overall according to the extant documents, Ariosto’s plays were staged eleven times from 1508 to 1532, ten performances in Ferrara and one in Rome. The immediate success of Ariosto’s plays shows his genuine talents for composing plays that overshadowed and replaced the performance of Latin plays in Ferrara.

The court of Ferrara, ruled by the Este family took a leading role in the revival of Latin plays, in particular during the reign of Duke Ercole I (r. 1471-1505). During his reign, twenty-two performances of the ancient Roman comedies composed by the dramatists Plautus and Terence were held in Ferrara and others in the Duchy of Mantua, where Isabella d’Este—the duke’s daughter—was Marchioness and a patron of the arts. Duke Ercole I commissioned the translation of the Latin plays into Italian for staging. The translators produced Italian versions of the Latin verse plays in either *terza rima* (groups of three lines rhyming ABA BCB CDC etc.) or eight-line stanzas of *ottava rima* (rhymed ABABABCC). Although most of the Latin plays were translated in this manner, they nonetheless showed some turgidity in the language. By choosing the *terza rima* structure, the translators altered the Latin verse lines since they had to adjust the interlocutor’s lines by giving no fewer than the full three lines for every speech. This choice affected the reception of Latin plays. At times the audience felt that the tediously long lines of the characters were less comical than the Latin ones and represented the description of a dialogue rather than the dialogue itself. For instance, Isabella d’Este considered a performance of *Bacchides* in 1502 to be “longa et fastidiosa” (long and wearisome).  

Along with commissioning the translation of Latin plays into Italian, the duke also sponsored their elaborate performance. The staging of a Latin play was usually accompanied by interludes or *intermezzi* between each act. The theme of the interludes was related to the festive occasion, and not necessarily to the play’s plot. In the interludes, dancers would perform *moresco* dances (morris dances) or amateur actors would stage a procession and recite allegorical verses or make allusions to Classical mythology. The duke spent lavishly on the production of

costumes for both play and interludes, for the scenery decorations and the hiring of professional scene-painters, costume designers, choreographers, and musicians. The profuse spending on the performance of Latin plays did not only contribute towards the successful revival of the Latin plays, but it did enable the duke to glorify the image of the Ferrara court by promoting high culture events.

In the fifteenth century the discovery and study of ancient Latin plays composed by Plautus and Terence significantly affected the reception of classical comedies and the development of erudite comedies in the following century. In 1428 (or 1429), Niccolò di Treviri (1400 or 1401-1461), a theologian and philosopher, discovered a manuscript containing twelve Plautus plays—about six to eight of his plays had already been known throughout the Middle Ages—in a German library. The first printed edition of these plays appeared in 1472. Both the manuscript and printed edition of the re-discovered Plautus plays inspired scholars to examine the structure, form, and style of the plays and increased the production of Latin plays.

In 1433 (or 1435) Giovanni Aurispa (1376-1459), a humanist and collector of Greek manuscripts, found a copy of Terence’s play accompanied by a commentary on the art of comedy by the fourth-century grammarian and scholar Aelius Donatus. The discovery of Donatus’s treatise played an indispensable role in the reception of Latin plays by the humanist scholars and dramatists. By referring to the treatise and Latin plays, the scholars and dramatists acquired the theoretical principles of the ancient Roman comedy. For one, they deduced that ancient Roman plays were divided into five acts according to the tripartite thematic structure (protasis, epitasis, and catastrophe) and that the plays sustained the unities of place, time, and action—the setting of the play had to remain unchanged throughout the play; the action had to evolve during a single day; and, the plot was represented by few characters and subplots. The close analysis of Donatus’s treatise and Plautus’s and Terence’s plays—that by the end of the fifteenth century were widely circulated in printed editions—deepened the knowledge of the classical world and enhanced both the performance and vernacular translations of classical plays.

In admiration of the classical world, ancient Roman comedies were revived in Italy and in particular in Ferrara, where Duke Ercole I alone commissioned the production of twenty-two Latin plays. The extravagant staging of Latin plays depicting ancient Roman street life and family situations, desperate lovers, conniving servants, gossiping maids, and boastfully proud
soldiers attracted an audience for several decades until the erudite comedies in Italian that made direct reference to contemporary Italian life appeared and quickly replaced the production of ancient Roman comedies.  

The first erudite comedy in prose in the Italian vernacular was Publio Filippo Mantovano’s *Formicone*; it was performed in a boys’s school by the students of Francesco Vigilio in Mantua on 12 November 1503. The play is composed in line with the classical tradition—it is divided into five acts in line with the tripartite thematic structure (*protasis*, *epitasis*, and *catastrophe*)—, and it sustains the unities of place, action, and time. The play follows the classical models in terms of the plot structure; its primary source, however, is drawn not from classical plays, but from a tale of the *Golden Ass* of Lucius Apuleius (c.125-c.180). In this play, prior to leaving on his business trip, the well-to-do merchant Barbaro ordered his servant Formicone to guard his wife Poliphila. The servant Formicone promised to watch her day and night, but as soon as Barbaro had left the house the servant Formicone decided to play tricks on his master. First, he arranged a night tryst for Poliphila with a lover; then he put Barbaro off for a while by pretending to have no key to the front door, so that the lover of Poliphila would escape by the back door; and lastly, when his master Barbaro had discovered a pair of man’s slippers in the bedroom of Poliphila, the servant Formicone explained that he was only playing a joke. This first erudite comedy might have greatly entertained an audience in particular Isabella d’Este since a couple of hours after the performance she wrote a letter to her husband Francesco Gonzaga highly praising both the play and its performance: “la comedia per el subiecto, compositione e recitanti fu bellina, et seria stata onorevole in una sala grande apparata.”

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61 Francesco Vigilio (1446-1534) was a playwright, writer, and a teacher of grammar. He was also a preceptor of Federigo Gonzaga (1500-1540), the son of Isabella d’Este and the marquis Francesco Gonzaga. According to Isabella d’Este’s letter written after the performance of *Formicone*, her son Federigo Gonzaga was actively involved in the play performance. For the information on this letter see, Lucchini’s edition of *Formicone*, 5.

In Ferrara, the first erudite comedy to be staged was Ludovico Ariosto’s *La Cassaria*, mounted at court in 1508. This play immediately conquered the hearts of its audience in spite of the fact that the spectators were well accustomed to seeing plays about ancient Roman street life. It seems that Ariosto’s acknowledgement of the classical tradition, his mindfulness of current customs, and his aspiration to compose a comedy that would establish a continuum between the ancient Roman world and his contemporary Italian world led him to produce a play that met with immediate audience approval.

Ariosto closely followed the classical canons by composing *La Cassaria* with a prologue and by adapting the three-part plot structure outlined by Donatus in his commentary on the art of comedy—protasis (exposition in Acts I and II), epitasis (complication in Acts III and IV), and catastrophe (resolution in Act V). In composing his play, Ariosto also freely imitated Plautus’s *Aulularia* and Terence’s *Mostellaria*. While adhering to the traditional conventions, he also introduced innovations by setting the play in a contemporary location and by enriching it with elements of contemporary realism. Although the roster of characters in the play closely resembles that of the Latin plays complete with desperate lovers, wily servants, irresponsible sons and conservative fathers, it also presents a microcosm of social structure in sixteenth-century Ferrara, with wealthy merchants who represent the new urban class of Renaissance Italy, a city-governor, ducal officials, sex-trafficker, and servants. Moreover, Ariosto enriched his play with carnivalesque elements in order to express more freely his (or society’s) frustrations over current social problems in Ferrara, without, however, threatening the established hierarchy thanks, in part, to the carnival season and the carnival spirit we will be discussing later in this thesis.

After the successful reception of his first play, Ariosto composed other comedies. With each, he demonstrated a gradual liberation from the imitation of Latin precursors. If *I Suppositi* represents the substitution of a servant for a master similar to that in the *Eunuchus* by Plautus

63 The courtiers Bernardino de’ Prosperi, Girolamo da Sestula, and Alfonso Paolucci left detailed accounts of both staging and reception of the prose and verse plays *La Cassaria* and *I Suppositi*. Their letters are cited in the first part of this chapter. Very little is known about the reception *Il Negromante* and *La Lena* received from their audiences, but apparently it was equally positive. There are only brief references to them in correspondences between Isabella d’Este and her courtiers reporting the dates of staging and their successful performances. Even though there are no detailed reports on audience reception of *Il Negromante* and *La Lena*, the three performances of *La Lena* suggest that this play, for one, must have pleased spectators enough to warrant multiple presentations.
and in the Captivi by Terence, and if I Studenti depicts a scheme similar to the one found in Terence’s Heautontimorumenos, then Il Negromante and especially La Lena are free from classical models. These last plays are richly embellished with allusions to historical events and references to current issues of Ferrara.

Ariosto’s contribution to the development of erudite comedy in the sixteenth century was both praised and criticized by his contemporaries. In his Discorso intorno alla nostra lingua Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), himself soon to compose a very successful play, expressed his views on Ariosto’s I Suppositi by pointing out the strengths and weaknesses in Ariosto’s play. He distinctly praised Ariosto’s talents in composing the play in a graceful style with the tripartite plot structure, but at the same time highlighted Ariosto’s inability to maintain decorum in the comedy. Machiavelli followed Cicero’s definition of comedy as reformulated by Donatus whereby “Comedy is an imitation of life, a mirror of manners, and an image of truth.” Machiavelli believed that comedy should excite laughter by using popular words and expressions in a local language understood by its audience:

Di questa sorte sono le comedie; perché, ancora che il fine d’una comedia sia proporre uno specchio d’una vita privata, nondimeno il suo modo del farlo è con certa urbanità et termini che muovino riso, acciò che gl’huomini, correndo a quella delettatione, gustino poi l’esempio utile che vi è sotto. ...Ma perché le cose sono trattate ridiculamente, conviene usare termini et motti che faccino questi effetti; i quali termini, se non sono proprii et patrii, dove sieno soli intesi et noti, non muovono né possono muovere.

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64 It was written in autumn of 1514 but first published in 1730. For a discussion over the date of completion of this work, see “Introduzione” by Paolo Trovato in Machiavelli, Discorso intorno alla nostra lingua, ix-iv. For general discussion on Machiavelli’s comments on language concerning the play I Suppositi, see “The Centaur and the Magpie: Ariosto and Machiavelli’s Prince” by Charles D. Klopp in Ariosto 1974 in America, 69-84.

65 Machiavelli composed La Mandragola some time between 1513 and 1520; La Mandragola’s immediate success was obvious since the play was performed several times and was printed three times in the 1520s, and innumerable times thereafter to the present day. Moreover, La Mandragola became the best known and most translated of all the comedies composed in sixteenth-century Italy. For the information on La Mandragola, see Bonfantini and Mezzanotte’s edition of La Mandragola Belfagor Lettere, 4; Andrews, Scripts and scenarios, 51-52.

66 Cited in Andrews, Scripts and scenarios, 29.

67 Machiavelli, Discorso intorno alla nostra lingua, 61-62.
In his opinion, if a comedy contained words and expressions that were not known to its audience, it might lack comic effect. To demonstrate an imperfect use of language in a comedy, Machiavelli drew his examples from Ariosto’s *I Suppositi*:

Et a provar questo, io voglio che tu leggi una commedia fatta da uno della Ariosti di Ferrara; et vedrai una gentil composizione et uno stilo ornato et ordinato; vedrai un nodo bene accommodato et meglio sciolto; ma la vedrai priva di quei sali che ricerca una commedia; tale non per altra cagione che per la detta: perché i motti ferraresi non li piacevano, et i fiorentini non sapeva, talmente che gli lasciò stare. Usonne uno comune, et credo ancora fatto comune per via di Firenze, dicendo che un dottore della berretta lunga pagherebbe una sua dama di doppioni. Usonne uno proprio, per il quale si vede quanto sta male mescolare il ferrarese con il toscano: ché, dicendo una di non volere parlare dove fussino orecchie che l’udissino, le fa rispondere che non parlassino dove <fussino> i bigonzoni; et un gusto purgato sa quanto nel leggere et nell’udire dire bigonzoni è offeso. Et vedesi facilmente et in questo et in molti altri luoghi con quanta difficultà egli mantiene il decoro di quella lingua che’egli ha accattata.

Machiavelli found fault with Ariosto’s ability to create comic effects by pointing out that the latter was unable to use common and popular words and expressions that excite laughter in an audience. In Machiavelli’s view Ariosto used only one good popular expression, ‘pagare in doppioni’ (to pay double), in his *I Suppositi*, and that was clearly not sufficient. Along with this criticism, Machiavelli also berated Ariosto for using the Tuscan word ‘bigoncioni’ (a tub that is usually carried on a pole inserted through handles), but with a Ferrarese pronunciation and spelling ‘bigonzoni.’ Apparently to use a Tuscan word with a Ferrarese pronunciation was wrong. Machiavelli also noted that there were other such errors in Ariosto’s play, but did not provide examples to suport his observation.

Machiavelli’s critical evaluation of Ariosto’s language should not, in any degree, discredit Ariosto’s talents for dramatic compositions. Machiavelli’s concerns about the proper use of the Florentine dialect in literary composition were inspired by a debate over what was the correct form of the Italian literary language, a question that was discussed with much energy by many sixteenth-century theorists. In his “Discorso”, Machiavelli focused his attention mainly on an analysis of the Florentine dialect as used by Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio and by his contemporaries—including Ariosto. In so doing, he pointed out that there were inherent

68 Machiavelli, *Discorso intorno alla nostra lingua*, 62-64.
problems in the use of the Tuscan dialect by writers who were not native Tuscan speakers. Machiavelli realized that it was a challenge for a non-Tuscan to write well in the Florentine dialect because of insufficient knowledge of the idiom, so he offered a reasonable solution—one might learn a language and its idiomatic expressions by living where the target language was spoken:

> Pertanto io concludo che molte cose sono quelle che non si possono scrivere bene senza intendere le cose proprie et particolari di quella lingua ch’è più in mezzo. Et volendo li proprii, conviene andare alla fonte donde quella lingua ha havuto origine, altrimenti si fa una composizione dove l’una parte non corrisponde a l’altra.69

Ariosto was not a native speaker of the Florentine dialect, but composed all his plays in that idiom. He and all other non-Tuscan writers acquired the Florentine dialect, which gradually became the standard literary language, by reading literary works, not by using it on site in a daily basis; as a result, he could not know the language as well as Tuscan writers did.

A few decades later, Giambattista Giraldi Cintio (1504-1573), a sixteenth-century professor of philosophy and rhetoric at Ferrara, studied the principles of dramatic composition laid out by Aristotle in the fourth century B.C. in his Poetics and Horace in the first century B.C. in his Ars poetica and then advanced his own guidelines for both tragedy and comedy. He did this in his treatise Discorso intorno al componere delle commedie e delle tragedie (1545).70 Briefly put, Aristotle, who had no intention of examining the structure of dramatic works or establish certain rules, simply advanced a general aesthetics concerning poetry and tried to see how authors achieved perfection in their art. Aristotle considered the audience to be universal and believed that it perceived the world by relying on its personal thoughts and feelings. Horace, instead, was much more specific and proposed that a dramatic work should adhere to certain conventions of form, namely, that it should be divided into five acts and have a limited number of performers; its characters should preserve the decorum of their persona, and the style of the work should correspond to its nature. Giraldi adapted Aristotle’s general observations and Horace’s specific principles in order to develop his own canons for both comedy and tragedy.

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69 Machiavelli, Discorso intorno alla nostra lingua, 65-66.
70 Marotti, Lo spettacolo dall’Umanesimo al Manierismo, 234-240; Peggy, “‘Fuor di quel costume antico’: innovation versus tradition in the prologues of Giraldi Cintio’s tragedies,” 49-66.
highlighting their content, style, and structure.\textsuperscript{71} Giraldi believed that both tragedy and comedy should have a didactic purpose, that is, they teach good behaviour and help the audience learn a moral lesson. Dramatic compositions, therefore, should please and entertain the audience and must not contain obscene allusions or remarks; the action of the play should be portrayed with a great sense of verisimilitude that is, with “the appearance of truth” and therefore, it should be set in a local place and represent current time. In his view, both comedy and tragedy should be composed in verse; the action depicted in a play should not extend past a twenty-four hours period (the so-called, unity of time), while the actual performance of a comedy should last three hours. A comedy should have a happy ending that resolves all complications. Giraldi’s guidelines for dramatic compositions influenced the development of “neo-classical” principles and the reception and production of the dramatic works in general for centuries to come.\textsuperscript{72}

To demonstrate his theory in application, Giraldi examined several dramatic compositions, among which four of Ariosto’s plays excluding the incomplete play, \textit{I Studenti}. In Giraldi’s opinion, \textit{La Cassaria} in verse form is Ariosto’s best because it so resembles Latin plays that it may be compared with the best ancient Roman comedies and because it presents an elaborate double plot structure. Giraldi placed \textit{La Lena} in second place after \textit{La Cassaria} because of its single plot structured in the tri-partite form, and he admired \textit{I Suppositi} and \textit{Il Negromante} less because of their lack of verisimilitude:

\begin{quote}
Le quali due favole sono tutte su l’ingegno del poeta e quanto al nodo e quanto alla soluzione, nella qual cosa riusci maraviglioso l’Ariosto nella sua Cassaria, la quale è tanto più vaga, a tanto più artificiosa d’ogni sua comedia, quanto ella quasi naturalmente da sé si scioglie, ed egli in essa più che nell’altrè, usò questa parte, della qual ragionato abbiamo: e tale mi è sempre paruta questa comedia che ho tenuto ch’ella con tutte le latine si possa porre a paragone. Il secondo luogo tiene la Lena (quantuque ella sia di semplice argomento, ove la Cassaria è di doppio), per la naturale esplicazione del nodo che in essa si ritrova. Il terzo i Suppositi, ai quali alcuni hanno dato il primo, non considerando il poco verisimile che vi si trova nella contenzione del servo col padrone, ed in quella del Sanese col medesimo; il quale poco verisimile fe’ il suo Negromante non molto lodevole.\textsuperscript{73}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{71} Radcliff-Umstead, \textit{The Birth of Modern Comedy in Renaissance Italy}, 2-3.
\textsuperscript{72} Radcliff-Umstead, \textit{The Birth of Modern Comedy in Renaissance Italy}, 2-5; See also Attolini, \textit{Teatro e spettacolo nel rinascimento}, 206-237; Weinberg, \textit{A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance}, 433-444;
\textsuperscript{73} Giraldi, \textit{Gli Eudemoni}, lx.
In spite of the fact that Giraldi favoured *La Cassaria* and valued less Ariosto’s other comedies, he recommended all of Ariosto’s comedies as models for dramatic compositions. In fact, his praise of Ariosto’s comedies was such that he singled out only two dramatists as worthy of imitation: Terence and Ariosto. He then went on to say that among modern plays only those that had imitated Ariosto’s were worthy of praise: “Ma varie furono appresso gli antichi le sorti delle comedie e delle tragedie altresì; ma della varietà di quelle [le comedie] non accade ora a parlare, poiché tra noi oggidì le lodevoli sono di una sola maniera, e sono quelle che imitano quelle dell’Ariosto.”

In the second half of the sixteenth century, Ariosto’s plays penetrated France. They were translated into French and used as models for dramatic compositions. Jean de la Taille (1533-1611 or 1612), known for his four plays written no later than 1562 and for his short treatise *De l’art de la tragédie*, translated *Il Negromante* into French with the title *Le Negromant*. For his translation La Taille used the printed edition of the first version of *Il Negromante* published by Nicolo d’Aristotile also known as Zoppino at Venice in 1535. It, therefore, represents only Ariosto’s first version of *Il Negromante* that due to its imperfection was never staged during Ariosto’s lifetime.

In 1562, La Taille published his own comedy *Les Corrivaus*, one of his best dramatic compositions. The work is considered to be the earliest original prose comedy composed in French during the Renaissance. It has been suggested that in *Les Corrivaus* La Taille drew to a significant extent, both lexically and stylistically, on Ariosto’s comedy *I Suppositi* (1509), which was translated into French and published by Jean-Pierre des Mesmes under the title *Comédie des supposez* (1522). La Taille also used Boccaccio’s *Decameron* and the play *Gli Ingannati*, a collective work by the Accademici Intronati of Siena, as inspiration for his comedy, but broadly speaking it seems that it was Ariosto’s comedies that significantly affected his literary oeuvre.

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76 Hall, “A Defence of Jean de la Taille as a Translator of Ariosto,” 536. For a comprehensive study of the printed editions of Ariosto’s plays, see Catalano’s edition of *Le commedie; con VIII tavole fuori testo*.
77 La Taille, *Les Corrivaus*, x.
Ariosto’s *I Suppositi* also reached Elizabethan England. The poet and dramatist George Gascoigne (c.1535-1578) translated it into English prose in 1566 under the title *Supposes*. For his translation, Gascoigne used both the prose and verse versions of *I Suppositi*. Although Gascoigne attempted to provide a close translation that left intact the content of the play, his final work actually reflects his own interpretation of *I Suppositi* and the cultural ideology of Elizabethan England. Apparently, in Elizabethan England an erudite comedy was viewed as an elaboration of sexually licentious fiction; and as a result the Italian original was censored in accordance with a general reformation of manners initiated by the English government. Gascoigne, therefore, deliberately modified Ariosto’s play prior to its introduction to the English public.

Gascoigne’s alterations to Ariosto’s plays were significant. He introduced marginal annotations emphasizing each deceitful ‘suppose’ in an attempt to guide the proper reception of the play. Along with these changes, Gascoigne replaced allusions to Ferrara and its institutions with neutral allusions since for an English audience these places had no significance. Lastly, he took liberty with the text and extended speeches in accordance with a rhetorical stylization commonly used by Elizabethan dramatists. An indispensable requirement for decorum helped to enrich speeches with expressions of longing, anxiety, regret, or despair when characters were speaking of their woe or lamenting the slings of fortune. For example, in order to maintain decorum Gascoigne modified Damone’s speech in Act III on the issues involved with raising children by extending it to almost twice its original length. In general, all these significant changes suggest that Gascoigne’s *Supposes* resembles Ariosto’s play only in its general content for it has been “Englished” and modified for the Elizabethan theatre. Nonetheless Gascoigne’s decision to insert marginal annotations, to eliminate allusions to Ferrarese places, and to extend speeches reflects his desire to make Ariosto’s comedy pass his country’s strict censorship and introduce Ariosto’s dramatic composition to Elizabethan England.

Gascoigne’s *Supposes* was first performed by the law students of Gray’s Inn in 1566, probably during the Christmas revels. Sixteen years later, it was staged again on 8 January 1582 at Trinity College in Oxford. And it was also published twice, first in 1572-73 and then in 1575

in *The Posies*, a collection of Gascoigne’s lyrical oeuvre. Gascoigne’s effort to introduce Ariosto’s play to the English public, therefore, was successful both on the stage and in print, so much so that it influenced the development of English drama.

Throughout the 1580s and 1590s the playwrights of the newly-born commercial theatre in Italy, France, and England used sixteenth-century Italian comedies written by Ariosto, Dovizi, Machiavelli, and their successors as a source. There are traces of the *Suppositi* in William Shakespeare’s in the early comedies, and especially in *Comedy of Errors* (sometime between 1589 and 1595) and the *Taming of the Shrew* (1590-91). Thus the development of English drama was partly influenced by the Latin plays that penetrated England through the intermediary work of the Italian Renaissance playwrights. Ariosto’s play indirectly influenced the development of English drama thanks to Gascoigne’s “Englished” recreation of *I Suppositi*.

As this brief survey of the reception of Ariosto’s comedies in the sixteenth century illustrates, Ariosto’s plays were successful both with audiences and among critics. They were staged multiple times in Ferrara and elsewhere, and received a favourable press from scholars and writers in Italy and abroad. They also attracted the attention of sixteenth-century literary theorists who examined them and sometimes even called upon them as models. And they also became sources of inspiration for other dramatists not only in Italy, but also in France and England where, in their translated version, they became models for new dramatic compositions in these languages.

**(ii) Ariosto’s Plays in the XVII-XVIII Centuries**

In the seventeenth century, Ariosto’s dramatic compositions sank into oblivion. If in the sixteenth century they entertained Italian spectators and inspired scholars to examine them and playwrights to imitate them, in the seventeenth they were either forgotten or ignored. In this century new dramatic forms such as the *Commedia dell’arte* and the opera became popular forms

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of entertainment for both court spectators and the general public, so much so that they quickly overshadowed erudite comedies, which came to be viewed as an old-fashioned and passé art form. Consequently, scholars’s interest also shifted from erudite comedies to the *Commedia dell’arte* and the opera.82

In the eighteenth century, Italian scholars once again became interested in studying ancient Greek and Latin drama. They enthusiastically tried to identify how classical drama influenced Italian literary works. In this spirit of Neoclassicism, coloured to a great extent by an increased interest in Italian history and a growing sense of Italian cultural identity, Ariosto’s plays enjoyed renewed interest and appreciation. His contribution to the development of Italian theatre drew the attention of literary scholars and historians alike, who examined Ariosto’s comedies and recorded their analyses in compendia of “literary history.”

At the beginning of the eighteenth century there was even an attempt to stage once again one of Ariosto’s comedies. Luigi Riccoboni (1676-1753), an Italian comedian best known as Lélio, was the author of several important primary sources on the *Commedia dell’arte* and on acting methods. While acting in the improvised comedy that was popular at the time, he noticed some weaknesses in extempore performances. He therefore tried to impose some order in the chaotic and improvised *Commedia dell’arte* by adapting scripts to the written works of earlier dramatists. In 1713 in Venice, he staged the tragedy *Merope* by the Italian scholar and writer Scipione Maffei (1675-1755) and the comedy *La Scolastica* by Ariosto. The audience tremendously enjoyed the performance of *Merope* and was greatly entertained; however, it showed an opposite reaction to Ariosto’s comedy. In his *Discorso della commedia all’improviso e scenari inediti*, Riccoboni described the unfavourable reception *La Scolastica* received from its Venetian audience as follows:

Scielsi fra le Comedie in verso de l’Ariosto la *Scolastica*, come la meno libertinia, e con qualche alterazione, cioè levandoci un frate, e sostituendo altro docente personaggio in sua vece, moderando lo scioglimento col sfugire uno stupro, e cambiandone in circa cento e cinquanta versi, la posi su la Scena nella Città di Venezia dove mi trovavo; ma fu con

tale sfortunato successo, che doppo una smoderata inquietudine de’ miei spettatori fu necessario di finirne la rappresentazione al principio del’atto quinto. I più sciochi del mio numeroso uditorio si credevano che la Scolastica fosse l’Orlando furioso travestita in Comedia, e la gioventù ancora più studiosa e colta non sapeva che l’Ariosto avesse mai fatto Comedie. A l’ora fu che giudicai disperato il rime di. Vedevo che più d’uno de’ nostri Letterati moderni aveva bene data a l’Italia qualche Tragedia, ma che non si era ancora trovato che dasse una sola Comedia, onde non potevo ricorrere agli antichi, e molto meno a’ moderni. È egli vero che la mia Compagnia per più di dodici anni continui si è esercitata a rappresentare Tragedie? Questi tali Comici adunque, sebbene non virtuosi, avrebbero potuto così bene studiare una Comedia scritta, come facevano una Tragedia. Conviene però confessare che se non si è data rifforma sino ad ora al Teatro nostro, la colpa è tutta de l’antica Comedia, bellissima in un genere, ma deforme e l’estremo ne l’altro, che non ha lasciato il modo a’ Comici di darsi ad una fatica, alla quale li avrei assoggetti. 83

As the passage indicates, Riccoboni wrought some changes to La Scolastica prior to staging it. He replaced the representative of ecclesiastical order, Friar, with a representative of secular order, the Doctor of Law, so as to avoid provoking a controversial reaction from his spectators; and he also increased the length of the text by adding approximately one hundred and fifty verses to it. Despite Riccoboni’s efforts to update the comedy to eighteenth-century tastes and customs, La Scolastica failed to please its audience. Apparently, the audience expected to see a theatrical work based on Ariosto’s epic poem Orlando furioso and was surprised to learn that Ariosto had actually composed plays himself. While considering the pros and cons of the negative reception La Scolastica received, Riccoboni arrived at the conclusion that Ariosto’s comedy failed to please the audience for intrinsic and extrinsic reasons: first, because the play was not modern and, second, because the audience was accustomed to seeing tragedies composed by contemporary playwrights, but not the comedies composed by playwrights from two centuries earlier.

Although acknowledging that eighteenth-century audiences preferred tragedies to comedies, Riccoboni failed to admit that these audiences might have disliked Ariosto’s comedy because his own tampering with it had resulted in a misrepresentation of Ariosto’s original work. It is striking to note that Riccoboni chose La Scolastica and not one of Ariosto’s more successful and better known plays. This was, after all, a play that Ariosto had left incomplete and his

83 Cited in Alberti, La scena veneziana nell’età di Goldoni, 58.
brother, Gabriele, had completed after Ariosto’s passing.\textsuperscript{84} Even though Riccoboni’s revisions may seem insignificant, they did alter the content and style of Ariosto’s comedy since with the elimination of the Friar, who played an indispensable role in portraying corruption, the satire on the ecclesiastical order was removed; moreover, it is not clear what effect Riccoboni’s added lines had on the play, but the fact that he added more than one hundred verses to Ariosto’s work suggests that those lines reflect Riccoboni’s interpretation of the comedy. Taking into account that \textit{La Scolastica} had been modified twice, first by Gabriele Ariosto and then by Riccoboni, one might well conclude that the comedy mounted in Venice in 1713 resembled very little Ariosto’s original play, \textit{I Studenti}. The negative reception of Riccoboni’s staging of \textit{La Scolastica}, therefore, should not be interpreted as a rejection of Ariosto’s dramatic composition, but as a reaction triggered by an imperfect presentation.

The latter, in fact, may well be the case. One of Riccoboni’s contemporaries, Giulio Cesare Becelli (1686-1750), a poet, playwright and a follower of Maffei, openly disapproved of Riccoboni’s decision to alter \textit{La Scolastica} and blamed him and his troupe for the poor reception the play and the performance received. In his \textit{Lettera ammonitoria}, Becelli wrote as follows:

\begin{quote}
Voi voleste far il dottore, e andando a Venezia di vostro capriccio, voleste recitarne una, sciegliendo quel la ch’era meno a caso, distribuendo le parti pessimamente, recitando male, e inserendovi quantità di versi nuovi, che appresso quei dell’Ariosto erano insopportabili. Però vi furon fatte le fischiate con tutta ragione, e non furon fatte all’Ariosto, ma a voi. Quanto sia falso che non la volessero soffrire, perché non vi era truffaldino, si vede chiaro, perché pochi anni dopo fu recitata in quell’istesso Teatro quella delle Cerimonie, ch’è parimenti in versi, e senza truffaldino, né altre maschere, e pur fu voluta dieci sere di seguito con infinito concorso, e con piacere ed applauso. È falsissimo dunque, che non piacciono a Venezia se non buffonerie. A Venezia fino i barcaruoli intendono il Teatro assai più di voi.\textsuperscript{85}
\end{quote}

This letter clearly reflects Becelli’s antagonistic reaction instigated by Riccoboni’s remarks referring to the poor reception of Ariosto’s comedy by the Venetian audience. It also shows that Becelli appreciated Ariosto’s dramatic compositions. According to Becelli, Venetian audiences

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{84} It was completed by Ariosto’s brother, Gabriele. The title of the original comedy is \textit{I Studenti}.
\textsuperscript{85} Cited in Alberti, \textit{La scena veneziana nell’età di Goldoni}, 60.
\end{flushright}
appreciated not only tragedies, but also comedies and would have enjoyed Ariosto’s had it not been greatly altered and badly performed.

No matter how harshly Riccoboni’s experiment in staging one of Ariosto’s comedies was received by the Venetian spectators and by Becelli, his desire to revive one of Ariosto’s comedies is significant. For one, it let young spectators know that Ariosto did not compose only the epic poem *Orlando furioso*, but also dramatic compositions; and it demonstrated that Ariosto’s comedies were not entirely forgotten among scholars.

Although the staging of one of Ariosto’s comedies did not entertain eighteenth-century Venetian spectators, the comprehensive examination of all of Ariosto’s comedies was much more successful. Most eighteenth-century Jesuit historian writers and literary critics, namely, Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni, Giacinto Gimma, Francesco Saverio Quadrio, and Girolamo Tiraboschi, paid homage to Ariosto’s genuine literary talents. With his prolific studies in Italian literature, Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni (1663-1728), an Italian literary historian, critic, and poet, helped to pave the way for further studies in literary history. In his *Comentarj di Gio. Mario de’ Crescimbeni intorno alla sua istoria della vulgar poesia* (1702), Crescimbeni examined the origin and development of Italian literature including the literary works of Italian poets. In chapter four of his book, while discussing the development of Italian comedy, Crescimbeni claimed that Ariosto was both the leading and the best Italian playwright of his time (though, chronologically, he came second after Dovizi):

Or il primo, che mettesse in uso la buona, e regolata Comica nella Toscana Poesia, facendo il nostro parere fu Lodovico Ariosto, il quale prese l’esempio dalla *Calandria* di Bernardo Dovizio Cardinal di Bibbiena, che fu la prima, che uscisse in prosa l’anno 1524. ... L’Ariosto adunque quattro in prosa ne scrisse, cioè il *Suppositi*, il *Negromante*, la *Cassaria*, e la *Lena*; e poi veggendole prive del numero, che loro si conveniva, in verso sdruciolò le riformò; ed un’altra ne lasciò imperfetta cioè la *Scolastica*, che fu finita da M. Gabriello Ariosto Fratello di lui, le quali Commedie al parer di molti, sono le più belle, che si leggano in nostra lingua;  

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87 Crescimbeni, *Comentarj*, 203.
Although in his description of Ariosto’s comedies Crescimbeni provided incorrect information by stating that Ariosto first composed four of his comedies in prose and then versified them—according to Ariosto’s own prologues and his correspondence it is clear that he composed only two in prose, *La Cassaria* and *I Suppositi*—Crescimbeni’s appreciation of Ariosto’s dramatic works is significant since it is based on a comparative analysis of comedies by different authors throughout the sixteenth century. Because Crescimbeni’s *Comentary* was first published in 1702, it influenced subsequent eighteenth-century analyses of Ariosto’s literary works.

Following Crescimbeni’s work, Giacinto Gimma (1668-1735), an Italian scholar of history and literature, compiled a history of Italy that included literary, artistic, and scientific achievements. In his *Idea della storia dell’Italia* (1723), Gimma gave a brief account of Ariosto’s biography and his literary works. Gimma stated that Ariosto was the first to compose comedies in verse in Italian “Lodovico Ariosto nacque in Ferrara nel 1473 e nella Poesia latina si acquistò fama in Roma; alla Toscana poi applicatosi fu egli il primo a comporre Commedie co’ versi sciolti, ed anche sdruccioli, stimando di aver trovata la via del Jambo.” Gimma did not name Ariosto’s verse comedies and conveniently failed to indicate that Ariosto’s first composed comedies, *La Cassaria* and *I Suppositi* in prose and then versified them.

In his treatise, *Della storia e della ragione d’ogni poesia* (1739-1752), Francesco Saverio Quadrio (1695-1756), an Italian literary scholar and member of the Accademia dell’Arcadia in Rome (founded in 1690), examined the impact of classical Greek and Latin writers on modern Italian writers. He pointed out that Plautus and Terence exercised enormous influence on Renaissance dramatists who used their plays as a model and this, in turn, helped to establish a new form of Italian comic theatre, erudite comedy. Like Crescimbeni and Gimma, Quadrio carried out a comparative analysis of several plays composed by sixteenth-century dramatists and arrived at the conclusion that Ariosto was one of the best dramatists of the comic art in Renaissance Italy. He praised Ariosto for having composed comedies in accordance with classical models and called him “il Principe de’ Comici Italiani.” Quadrio also acknowledged that Ariosto was not the first dramatist to compose erudite comedies in line with classical...
sources, however, he considered Ariosto to be the most talented since he managed to surpass even classical playwrights. In his view, Ariosto was not only one of the best sixteenth-century dramatists, but also one of the leading dramatists who contributed to the development of Italian comic theatre.

Girolamo Tiraboschi (1731-1794), an influential scholar and literary critic, also examined the development of dramatic compositions in Italy. In his highly successful *Storia della poesia italiana* (1772-82), he convincingly argued that comedy was inferior in style and content to tragedy. He believed that, unlike tragedy, comedy was not written in an elegant style and it was less refined than tragedy because it portrayed familiar and domestic matters of common people. Tiraboschi concluded that comedies were usually plain, boring, and disgusting. 90 Despite this highly subjective negative evaluation of the genre, Tiraboschi did express great admiration for Ariosto’s comedies since they were composed in verse and resembled their classical sources. 91

It seems that for eighteenth-century literary historians, inspired by the growing sense of Italian cultural identity, it was essential to establish a continuum with the classical Latin world and thus locate the roots of modern Italian literature and culture in it. While in their analyses they judged Italian literary works in comparison with their classical models, they unanimously expressed an appreciation for Ariosto’s genuine comedic talents and admired his contribution to the development of Italian drama. Although Crescimbeni, Gimma, Quadrio, and Tiraboschi based their analyses of Ariosto’s dramatic compositions on general observation—they did not provide a detailed study of each comedy—, their works are important because they demonstrate that in the eighteenth century scholarship on Ariosto’s comedies enjoyed a revival and good press.

*(iii) Ariosto’s Plays in the XIX Century*

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90 “... per la maggior parte o son si languide e fredde, che muovono a noja, o sono si disoneste, che ributtano ogni animo saggio ed onesto,” See Tiraboschi, *Storia della poesia italiana*, 298.
91 Tiraboschi, *Storia della poesia italiana*, 296-300. For recent studies on Tiraboschi’s biography and literary achievements, see *Studi su Girolamo Tiraboschi e altre ricerche* by Casari, published in 2006, and *Girolamo Tiraboschi miscellanea di studi* by Venturi Barbolini (1999).
In the nineteenth century, literary scholars and theorists continued analysing the origin of Italian literature, including Ariosto’s contribution to the development of Italian comedy. In general, their reception of literary works was influenced by a growing sense of national identity and freedom affected by political reforms, namely, the establishment of the first republican structures and then the Kingdom of Italy. In this spirit, literary scholars such as Francesco Salfi, Giuseppe Maffei, Francesco De Sanctis, and Vincenzo De Amicis examined Ariosto’s dramatic compositions mainly focusing on historical aspects and general society as portrayed in the comedies.

Francesco Salfi (1759-1832), an Italian literary scholar, politician, and librettist, studied the history of Italian literature by analyzing literary works, history books on literature, and treatises produced throughout the centuries. He found that the majority of literary scholars focused their attention on writing biographies, while others highly praised Italian literary works without, however, offering any substantial analyses. Salfi, therefore, decided to base his account of Italian literature on an objective evaluation of literary compositions.\(^{92}\) In his *Ristretto della storia della letteratura italiana* (1831), Salfi analyzes the development of Italian literature throughout the centuries and focuses his attention on the development of sixteenth-century Italian comedy. While accepting the general notion that sixteenth-century comedies are based on classical models, Salfi states that they are also enriched with elements drawn from contemporary events. These comedies, therefore, should not be viewed as mere reproductions of classical comedies, but as literary compositions portraying sixteenth-century Italian customs and events, and in this sense they should be considered of national significance.\(^{93}\) For instance, even though Ariosto’s comedies are composed in imitation of the classical comedies by Plautus and Terence, they nonetheless bring to the stage characters, adventures, intrigues, and dialogues that reflect real, current situations in Italy, and they do so in a very natural manner. An example of this is the manner in which Ariosto derides human folly and vice, freely attributing these faults to both lay

\[^{92}\text{Salfi, }\text{*Ristretto della storia della letteratura Italiana*}, \text{xii-xiii.}\]
\[^{93}\text{Salfi, }\text{*Ristretto della storia della letteratura Italiana*}, \text{206.}\]
and ecclesiastical members of society. \textsuperscript{94} Ariosto’s comedies thus truly reflect national Italian characteristics. \textsuperscript{95}

Giuseppe Maffei (1775-1858), an Italian scholar and writer, also looked at the development of Italian literature through the prism of national spirit. In his \textit{Storia della letteratura italiana dall’origine della lingua a’ nostri giorni} (1834), Maffei analyzed Ariosto’s literary works. Although he focused his attention mainly on Ariosto’s epic poem \textit{Orlando furioso}, Maffei did not fail to consider Ariosto’s contribution to the development of Italian comedy. Following the general observations on Ariosto’s comedies made by previous literary scholars stating that all of Ariosto’s comedies were produced in classical imitations; that Ariosto composed his first two comedies in prose and then versified them; and lastly, that he left one play incomplete, \textsuperscript{96} Maffei expressed his own judgement on Ariosto’s theatrical contributions. He highly valued Ariosto’s genuine talents for composing comedies in an elegant and natural style, for creating ingenious jokes and intrigues, although not always verisimilar, and for devising a well developed plot and characters. In the conclusion of his analysis, Maffei urged his readers to accept Ariosto’s use of lewd jokes—which in the nineteenth century were considered to be inappropriate—as an indispensable characteristic pertaining to sixteenth-century Italian theatre. He wrote as follows:

\begin{quote}
A chi poi si lamenta di alcuni scherzi lubrici che qua e là fanno aggrinzar le nari, e giustamente, alle persone ben costumate, ricorderemo che il teatro italiano era in que’ tempi contaminato da laide e mal condotte commedie, e che mal potè l’Ariosto tenersi all’intutto puro da un vizio che allora era comune. \textsuperscript{97}
\end{quote}

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Francesco De Sanctis (1817-1883), a highly influential Italian literary critic, also analyzed the development of Italian literature in the \textit{Storia della letteratura italiana} (1870-71). His examinations of the development of Renaissance comedy in general and Ariosto’s comedies in particular reflect De Sanctis’s rejection of

\textsuperscript{94} Salfi, \textit{Ristretto della storia della letteratura Italiana}, 211.
\textsuperscript{95} Salfi, \textit{Ristretto della storia della letteratura Italiana}, 206.
\textsuperscript{96} Maffei, \textit{Storia della letteratura italiana}, 279.
\textsuperscript{97} Maffei, \textit{Storia della letteratura italiana}, 288.
rhetorical and formalistic criticism that interpreted a work of art as an unconscious product of the world perceived at a particular moment of its existence. De Sanctis strongly believed that literary works should explore moral values and contain elements of realism; and so he highly praised only those compositions that touch on moral integrity and society at large while depreciating or ignoring those that failed to do so. De Sanctis openly disliked Ariosto’s comedies because, in his opinion, they portrayed nothing but an imaginary world; they were composed in close imitation of the rules of poetic art and forms best evidenced in Plautus and Terence; and thus, they were mere reproductions of an ancient Latin world represented by servants, parasites, courtesans, miserly fathers, and spendthrift sons. De Sanctis also believed that Ariosto failed to create the finest situations and comic contrasts that reflect the comic spirit of the time because he focused on the reproduction of the Latin world in his comedies, and not on his own times.

De Sanctis’s negative evaluation of Ariosto’s dramatic compositions is undoubtedly based on generalisations. He focused his attention on only two comedies, La Cassaria and Il Negromante. In his evaluation of La Cassaria, De Sanctis praised Ariosto for creating comic effects, produced by confusions and intrigues, but at the same time criticised Ariosto for poorly developing both the characters and the plot. De Sanctis’s examination of Il Negromante also highlights Ariosto’s inability to create an original comedy. According to De Sanctis, in this play, the swindler is an astrologer who resembles the character—of a priest or friar who obtains money out of fools by his lies—that was presented by Boccaccio in Decameron. Because of this Ariosto did not (according to De Sanctis) create this character, but merely imitated the swindler figure from the Decameron. Furthermore, De Sanctis suggested that in Il Negromante, Ariosto reproduced only the Latin world of servants and developed the characters ineffectively. De Sanctis wrote as follows:

Cintio, Camillo, Massimo sono mummie più che uomini, preda facile de’ birboni che ci vivono intorno. Sono essi non il principale, ma il fondo del quadro, la vile moltitudine

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98 Radcliff-Umstead, *The Birth of Modern Comedy in Renaissance Italy*, 15.
100 De Sanctis, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, 5.
sulla quale si esercita la malizia de’ servi e degli avventurieri. Concetto profondo, se l’Ariosto l’avesse trovato lui e ne avesse cavato un mondo comico. Ma ci sta a pigione e senza alcun senso, come se fosse cosa naturalissima questo mondo còlto al rovescio, sì che i servitori ne sappiano più dei padroni e diventino i loro tutori e salvatori, come Fazio e Temolo, che scoprono e sventano le malizie del negromante. Costui, che è il protagonista, non è proprio un astrologo, com’è nel Lasca, e come il prete è nel Boccaccio; ma è un birbone matricolato, che fa l’astrologo senza crederci punto. Nel Lasca la materia comica è cavata dall’astrologia messa in burla: qui l’astrologia ci sta per comparsa, né da essa escono i mezzi d’azione. Se maestro Iachelino, che è il negromante, fosse un vero astrologo, com’è nel Lasca, e come il prete è nel Boccaccio; ma è un birbone matricolato, che fa l’astrologo senza crederci punto. Nel Lasca la materia comica è cavata dall’astrologia messa in burla: qui l’astrologia ci sta per comparsa, né da essa escono i mezzi d’azione. Se maestro Iachelino, che è il negromante, fosse un vero astrologo, com’è nel Lasca, e come il prete è nel Boccaccio; ma è un birbone matricolato, che fa l’astrologo senza crederci punto. Nel Lasca la materia comica è cavata dall’astrologia messa in burla: qui l’astrologia ci sta per comparsa, né da essa escono i mezzi d’azione. Se maestro Iachelino, che è il negromante, fosse un vero astrologo, com’è nel Lasca, e come il prete è nel Boccaccio; ma è un birbone matricolato, che fa l’astrologo senza crederci punto. Nel Lasca la materia comica è cavata dall’astrologia messa in burla: qui l’astrologia ci sta per comparsa, né da essa escono i mezzi d’azione. Se maestro Iachelino, che è il negromante, fosse un vero astrologo, com’è nel Lasca, e come il prete è nel Boccaccio; ma è un birbone matricolato, che fa l’astrologia senza crederci punto. Nel Lasca la materia comica è cavata dall’astrologia messa in burla: qui l’astrologia ci sta per comparsa, né da essa escono i mezzi d’azione. Se maestro Iachelino, che è il negromante, fosse un vero astrologo, com’è nel Lasca, e come il prete è nel Boccaccio; ma è un birbone matricolato, che fa l’astrologia senza crederci punto. Nel Lasca la materia comica è cavata dall’astrologia messa in burla: qui l’astrologia ci sta per comparsa, né da essa escono i mezzi d’azione. Se maestro Iachelino, che è il negromante, fosse un vero astrologo, com’è nel Lasca, e come il prete è nel Boccaccio; ma è un birbone matricolato, che fa l’astrologia senza crederci punto. Nel Lasca la materia comica è cavata dall’astrologia messa in burla: qui l’astrologia ci sta per comparsa, né da essa escono i mezzi d’azione. Se maestro Iachelino, che è il negromante, fosse un vero astrologo, com’è nel Lasca, e come il prete è nel Boccaccio; ma è un birbone matricolato, che fa l’astrologia senza crederci punto. Nel Lasca la materia comica è cavata dall’astrologia messa in burla: qui l’astrologia ci sta per comparsa, né da essa escono i mezzi d’azione. Se maestro Iachelino, che è il negromante, fosse un vero astrologo, com’è nel Lasca, e come il prete è nel Boccaccio; ma è un birbone matricolato, che fa l’astrologia senza crederci punto. Nel Lasca la materia comica è cavata dall’astrologia messa in burla: qui l’astrologia ci sta per comparsa, né da essa escono i mezzi d’azione. Se maestro Iachelino, che è il negromante, fosse un vero astrologo, com’è nel Lasca, e come il prete è nel Boccaccio; ma è un birbone matricolato, che fa l’astrologia senza crederci punto. Nel Lasca la materia comica è cavata dall’astrologia messa in burla: qui l’astrologia ci sta per comparsa, né da essa escono i mezzi d’azione. Se maestro Iachelino, che è il negromante, fosse un vero astrologo, com’è nel Lasca, e come il prete è nel Boccaccio; ma è un birbone matricolato, che fa l’astrologia senza crederci punto. Nel Lasca la materia comica è cavata dall’astrologia messa in burla: qui l’astrologia ci sta per comparsa, né da essa escono i mezzi d’azione. Se maestro Iachelino, che è il negromante, fosse un vero astrologi

It seems that De Sanctis failed to recognise that in Il Negromante Ariosto did indeed portray his own sixteenth-century world and not the world of Latin Antiquity. In the play the action takes place in Ferrara, all characters resemble members of sixteenth-century society—well-to-do merchants, masters, servants, and an exiled Jew, to name but a few. Based on his analysis of the astrologer in Il Negromante, De Sanctis expected to see a dénouement in which the real astrologer was eventually fooled by a member of humble origin or even by a donkey. He ignored, however, the fact that Ariosto purposefully allowed the astrologer, who in reality is an exiled Jew, to deride and denigrate Ferrarese society. Considering that this daring action could have caused Ariosto serious trouble because in sixteenth-century Ferrara it was unacceptable to openly criticise the wealthy class, it becomes obvious that Ariosto’s comedy offers much more than what De Sanctis suggested. To achieve this, Ariosto created a world upside down, one in which servants know more than their masters and become their teachers and rescuers, and this world turned upside down did indeed reflect sixteenth-century Ferrara. Ariosto’s comedy, therefore, portrays society at large with a great sense of realism, pace De Sanctis.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century Vincenzo De Amicis, an Italian literary critic, examined the origin and development of sixteenth-century Italian comedy in his work. 

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103 De Sanctis, Storia della letteratura italiana, 6-7.
104 the life years are unknown
L’imitazione latina nella commedia italiana del XVI secolo (1897). In the spirit of national identity, De Amicis attempted to discover nationalistic characteristics in the Italian comedies of the sixteenth century, but failed to do so. He concluded that, because in the Cinquecento Italy was not a united country, sixteenth-century Italian comedy could not simply be defined as national. He wrote as follows:

L’Italia non essendo politicamente nazione, non ebbe né poteva avere la commedia veramente nazionale, la commedia, in cui si riflettesse la vita di tutto il popolo italiano dalle Alpi all’Adriatico, e che fosse come lo specchio dei costumi, delle doti e dei vizii di tutto il popolo italiano.\(^{105}\)

And yet, considering that the separate states or regions of Italy produced comedies reflecting local national spirit, public life, the relationship between people and the local governmental system,\(^{106}\) De Amicis did observe the historical significance of sixteenth-century comedies and pointed out that:

la scena è posta apertamente in Italia, i costumi posti sulle scene sono del tutto italiani, e vi si parla liberamente di principi e rettori senza circospezione e timidezza. I richiami ai principali avvenimenti pubblici d’Italia, come la discesa di Carlo VIII, il sacco di Roma, la presa di Otranto fatta dai Turchi, la lega di Cambrai, la cacciata di Ludovico il Moro ec. vi si incontrano assai frequentemente, e servono quasi a dare una data istorica al quadro dei costumi, che la commedia pone sotto gli occhi. E sebbene non possa dirsi commedia nazionale, pure essa ci rappresenta fedelmente lo stato morale d’Italia in quel tempo; non ce lo rappresenta, è vero, pei caratteri che pone sulle scene, ma quasi per incidente, nei dialoghi dei personaggi, nei monologhi specialmente, ed in talune frasi sparse qua e là. Se dovere del teatro fosse come dice Amleto: to show..... the very age and body of the time, its forms and pressure, certamente nessuno vi adempirebbe meglio che la commedia italiana del XVI secolo. Essa è per lo storico sorgente inesauribile di notizie, vivo quadro dei costumi e della vita famigliare degl’Italiani di quel tempo.\(^{107}\)

De Amicis’s evaluation of sixteenth-century Italian comedies marks a turning point in the reception of erudite comedy. Comedy is no longer perceived as the product of pure imitation of

\(^{105}\) De Amicis, L’imitazione latina nella commedia italiana del XVI secolo, 11.
\(^{106}\) De Amicis, L’imitazione latina nella commedia italiana del XVI secolo, 11.
\(^{107}\) De Amicis, L’imitazione latina nella commedia italiana del XVI secolo, 92-93.
classical models or as a dramatic composition filled with lewd content, but as a valuable source of contemporary sixteenth-century references to what constitutes Italian national identity.

In addition to emphasizing the historical significance of erudite comedies, De Amicis admired their satire of sixteenth-century Italian society. In his view, the use of satire is very significant because it is one of the specific elements that distinguish Italian comedy from its Latin predecessor. In his view, satire is also an indispensable instrument in the fight against oppressors. He states that “la satira era allora la sola arma che restava agli’Italiani contro i loro oppressori, e se ne servivano come meglio potevano.”108 Although De Amicis’s interpretation of the use of satire in sixteenth-century Italian comedy is based on the national ideology of his time, it nonetheless shows a drastic change in critical evaluation of erudite comedy.

While analysing Ariosto’s comedies, De Amicis notes that they are saturated with satire that derides human immorality and corruption. In Il Negromante, La Scolastica, and La Cassaria, for instance, Ariosto derides corrupt members of ecclesiastical orders.109 He also does not spare the governing sector of Ferrarese society from ridicule.110 While he criticises human vices, Ariosto describes the customs and habits of Ferrara; and so, in this sense too, his comedies are historically valuable.

Nineteenth-century literary scholars focused their attention on highlighting the historical value and national significance of Italian literary compositions. While examining Ariosto’s comedies, they reflected differing views on Ariosto’s works. Salfi and Maffei admired Ariosto’s comedies for their evident national Italian characteristics; De Sanctis, on the contrary, criticised Ariosto for reproducing the Latin world and losing touch with his contemporary world; and De Amicis valued the historical elements evident in Ariosto’s comedies. Even though they all show their own unique evaluations of Ariosto’s comedies, their works, broadly speaking, serve as evidence that Ariosto’s comedies engaged scholars’s interest throughout the nineteenth century.

108 De Amicis, L’imitazione latina nella commedia italiana del XVI secolo, 94.
109 De Amicis, L’imitazione latina nella commedia italiana del XVI secolo, 102-106.
110 De Amicis, L’imitazione latina nella commedia italiana del XVI secolo, 116-119.
In the first half of the twentieth century, Italian literary scholars continued to examine the development of Italian theatre over the centuries. In their analyses, the scholars focused their attention not only on the dramatic compositions in order to find elements of realism reflecting social conditions, but also on collecting and evaluating extant documents pertaining to the dramatic compositions and to their authors.

The first comprehensive study of Italian comedy can be found in Ireneo Sanesi’s *La Commedia* (1911). While tracing the origin and development of Italian comedy over the centuries, Sanesi thoroughly examined the content of Italian erudite comedies in order to emphasize not only dramatic techniques, but also the construction and arrangement of comic plays in the sixteenth century. His analysis is significant because it represents a shift toward a comprehensive study of Italian theatre that challenged current reception of sixteenth century drama.

Unlike his predecessors, Sanesi examined each of Ariosto’s comedies and pointed out Ariosto’s innovations. For instance, *La Cassaria* contains satire of the Spanish conquerors, of the papal court in Rome, and of administration officials in Ferrara. According to Sanesi, the use of satire is significant because it alludes to living conditions in sixteenth-century Italy.\(^{111}\) In addition, the play is rich in jargon used by criminals in sixteenth-century Italy.\(^ {112}\) As Sanesi explains, Ariosto used it in order to portray vividly contemporary life:

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\text{`l’Ariosto, introducendo i suoi due furfanti [the procurer Lucrano and his servant Furba] immaginari a discorrere in quell’oscuro linguaggio che era effettivamente usato dai furfanti reali del tempo suo, diede prova di tener rivolto lo sguardo, non solo ai modelli del teatro antico, ma anche alle forme della vita contemporanea e di voler temperare l’imitazione dei classici con la diretta osservazione del vero.'}^{113}
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\(^{111}\) Sanesi, *La Commedia*, 228.

\(^{112}\) Sanesi, *La Commedia*, 228-229.

\(^{113}\) Sanesi, *La Commedia*, 228-229.
Ariosto’s next comedy, *I Suppositi*, just like all of Ariosto’s comedies, is composed in line with classical comedies, but it also shows some affinities with one of Boccaccio’s stories from the *Decameron*. According to Sanesi, Ariosto did not introduce the scheme that allowed Erostrato to pretend to be a servant in his beloved’s house, but adapted it from *Decameron* VII.7: “lo stratagemma immaginato da Erostrato per poter vivere, travestito da servo, nella casa della donna amata, è quel medesimo di cui si serve Lodovico nella novella settima della settima giornata del *Decamerone*.”

Along with that, this comedy also contains references to the contemporary world; and it introduces a new character—the pedant—that would subsequently appear in many other erudite comedies: “Gioverà, infine, osservare che nei *Suppositi* appare per la prima volta, benché solo fuggevolmente e leggermente adombrato, il tipo del pedante che avrà poi largo e pieno sviluppo in altre commedie del Cinquecento.”

In *Il Negromante*, Ariosto derides those who believe in magic, astrology, prejudices, and superstitions. To do so, he introduces a false astrologer, who is in fact an ignorant and vulgar imposter, and has him swindle gullible people. Moreover, to create a clear contrast between gullible and rational people, Ariosto presents a servant with “good sense,” one who thinks rationally and logically. In Sanesi’s view, this servant does not have the traits of an ancient servant, but demonstrates some new and important characteristics—common sense, for one. In Ariosto, the servant is the voice of good sense. According to Sanesi, this character:

... non ha più nulla di comune con gli schiavi delle commedie latine e acquista quasi, ai nostri occhi, valore di simbolo. È la voce tranquilla e semplice del buon senso che si leva contro la falsa dottrina e vede spesse volte molto più in là di quel che la vacua presunzione possa e sappia vedere.

For Sanesi, Ariosto’s last comedy, *La Lena*, is the best one. Although it has some classical traits, it is nonetheless an original comedy. Sanesi notes:

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Certo, anche in essa troviamo ripetute situazioni comiche e tipi e motivi e frasi che ricorrono ad ogni piè sospinto nel teatro di Plauto e di Terenzio. Ma, ciò non ostante, essa ha ben diritto ad essere considerata come una commedia originale e può ben trovar luogo fra le più pregevoli opere drammatiche del Cinquecento: prima di tutto, perché entro le linee classiche della sua costruzione s’inquadra felicemente una favola che non ha quasi nessun rapporto con le favole dell’antico teatro e riproduce invece tutti i caratteri della novellistica medievale; poi, perché la satira, già così copiosa nelle altre commedie ariostesche, non guizza nella Lena soltanto qua e là fra il dialogo dei personaggi, ma dà occasione a intere scene episodiche ove essa acquista una prevalenza assoluta; e, finalmente, perché il poeta osserva e rende certi atteggiamenti del pensiero e certe sfumature del sentimento con maggiore acuità e con maggiore efficacia di quel che non avesse mai fatto.\textsuperscript{118}

According to Sanesi, this comedy reflects more the world of medieval Italy than that of ancient Rome since the comedy’s plot and its characters are composed in line with the Italian medieval novelistic tradition. Along with that, it is rich in satire. In fact, the entire comedy is saturated with satirical lines. As Sanesi further explains, Ariosto used satire in this comedy to deride corrupt and immoral members of his own Ferrarese society.\textsuperscript{119}

Overall, Sanesi’s comprehensive study of Ariosto’s comedies is significant because it offers an objective evaluation of the comedies. He rightfully highlights Ariosto’s innovations—elements of realism reflecting the living conditions of society—that distinguish his comedies from their Latin predecessors; and suggests that Ariosto’s comedies are truly national because they faithfully reflect Italian society.\textsuperscript{120}

Michele Carlo Catalano (1884-1955), an Italian scholar and writer, produced a remarkable study—a two-volume book, \textit{Vita di Ludovico Ariosto}, published in 1931—touching on Ariosto’s life, literary works, and his literary and administrative contributions to the house of Este. Catalano’s analysis is an indispensable source of information because it is based on a thorough examination of all sources available, such as Ariosto’s correspondence with the Este family and other lay or clerical individuals. It also offers biographical data collected from extant documents. Along with this, Catalano’s volume provides an insight into the life-style, customs,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{118} Sanesi, \textit{La Commedia}, 237-238.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Sanesi, \textit{La Commedia}, 238-240.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Sanesi, \textit{La Commedia}, 427.
\end{itemize}
and ideology of sixteenth-century Italy. Catalano’s monograph, therefore, is an excellent work of research (more than criticism) because it is so firmly based on an objective study not only of the plays themselves, but also of contemporary documents relevant to a fuller understanding of the plays and their context.

Giuseppe Toffanin (1891-1980), an Italian theatre critic and scholar, acknowledged that Ariosto was the first playwright to compose erudite comedies in Ferrara when he wrote:

Senonchè per quanti sporadici precorrimenti si possano trovare, è sempre lecito dire che la commedia volgare nasce in Ferrara con l’Ariosto ed era si può dir naturale che questo avvenisse. A Ferrara quest’epilogo era stato preparato da una sequela di ognor più liberi volgarizzamenti dei comici latini secondo il gusto particolarissimo della Corte estense.\(^{121}\)

Like Sanesi, Toffanin affirms that all of Ariosto’s comedies are composed in line with classical comedies and medieval novellistic tradition and that they are enriched with satire of contemporary society. In addition, however, Toffanin states that *La Lena* is the most beautiful of Ariosto’s comedies because it is modern: “tutto è modernità, tutto è attualità. Le allusioni ai fatti del giorno sono di una vivacità scoppettante e smagliante.”\(^{122}\) Although Toffanin does not provide many examples demonstrating this modernity, his statement is very important because it offers a fresh outlook on Ariosto’s comedies in general.

In the second half of the twentieth century, further examinations of erudite comedy, in particular Ariosto’s dramatic compositions, produced a significant body of scholarship. The philosopher and sometime politician Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), whose influence on Italian scholarship is still felt today, examined Ariosto’s comedies from a subjective point of view. Unlike Sanesi, Catalano, and Toffanin, Croce overtly disliked Ariosto’s plays and considered them to be mere reconstructions of ancient comedies. In Croce’s opinion, Ariosto’s comedies do not portray issues touching sixteenth-century Italian society and, therefore, are insignificant. He also openly criticised Ariosto’s decision to compose his plays in verse, more specifically in the *endecasillabo sdrucciolo* (an eleven-syllable line with the final stress on the antepenultimate

\(^{121}\) Toffanin, *Ludovico Ariosto*, 55.

\(^{122}\) Toffanin, *Ludovico Ariosto*, 77.
syllable) because, in Croce’s view, this verse form was artificially created in order to emulate Roman iambic verse and thus, in Italian, sounded stilted and false. Croce wrote as follows:

Così dicendo, mettiamo da parte le commedie, che tra quelle opere minori sembrano le maggiori, e tuttavia sono le meno significanti, e quasi si potrebbero escludere dalla storia del suo svolgimento poetico, riunendole piuttosto alle sue faccende di cortegiano, ordinatore di spettacoli e di recite, per le quali egli prescelse d’imitare la commedia latina (poiché altro non credeva che restasse da fare in questo campo) al modo che i latini avevano già imitato la greca. Le commedie ariostesche segnano senza dubbio una data importante nella storia del teatro italiano e della imitazione latina che vi prevalse, cioè nella storia della cultura, ma non in quella della poesia, nella quale sono mute. Lavori di ricalco e combinazione, e perciò stentati, non indovinarono nemmeno all’incirca la loro forma, a segno che l’Ariosto, dopo un primo tentativo di eseguire in prosa, le verseggiò in monotonì e fastidiosi endecasillabi sdrucchioli, che all’orecchio di nessuno hanno mai sonato bene, perché non nacquero ma furono costruiti sopra calcolo, con evidente artificio, per dare all’Italia il metro della commedia, analogo al giambico romano.\textsuperscript{123}

Clearly, in his evaluation of Ariosto’s comedies Croce intentionally ignored previous scholarship on Ariosto’s dramatic compositions that established that his comedies did, indeed, reflect the customs, tastes, and living conditions of sixteenth-century Italy. Croce’s criticism, partly affected by his strong beliefs—perhaps influenced by the Fascist regime—that dramatic compositions should convey a high level of moral integrity and fight against subjugation did not, fortunately, decrease scholars’ interest in Ariosto’s dramatic compositions.

Italian scholars thus not only continued to analyze Ariosto’s contributions to the development of Italian theatre, but also produced a number of significant critical editions of these plays, especially in the second half of the century. This flurry of editions was pre-announced in 1940 with the appearance of Michele Catalano’s critical edition of all of Ariosto’s comedies. In 1954, Cesare Segre’s edition of four of Ariosto’s comedies—La Cassaria (in prose), I Suppositi (in prose), La Lena, and Il Negromante—was published; in 1961, Aldo Borlenghi’s edition appeared containing all of Ariosto’s comedies; in 1976, Guido Davico Bonino’s edition of La Lena came out; in 1997 Luigina Stefani published what is, to date, the most recent edition of La Cassaria and I Suppositi (in prose). The appearance of so many critical

\textsuperscript{123} Croce, La letteratura italiana, 308-309.
editions of Ariosto’s plays within a relative small amount of time marks, broadly speaking, the sudden and literal explosion of interest in Ariosto’s comedies in the last eighty years.

Additional studies on Ariosto’s comedies were conducted after the appearance of the first critical editions. While focusing their attention on the origin of Ariosto’s comedies, emphasizing the imitation of classical Latin comedies and the incorporation of ideas from the medieval novelistic tradition, Italian scholars proceeded to identify elements of realism present in the comedies in order to point out Ariosto’s innovations. For instance, Giulio Natali believed that Ariosto’s comedies contained allusions to contemporary life\textsuperscript{124} and Luigi Russo stated that Ariosto portrayed the servants with a great sense of realism.\textsuperscript{125} Both Natali and Russo failed, however, to provide evidence to support their claims.

The most recent study on Ariosto’s comedies is published in Giulio Ferroni’s \textit{Ariosto}. While considering all of Ariosto’s literary and theatrical experiences, Ferroni arrives at the conclusion that Ariosto’s passion for theatre was influenced by the theatrical tradition initiated by the Este family in the late fifteenth century and that Ariosto’s acquired taste for theatre inspired him to compose the epic poem, \textit{Orlando furioso}. He points out:

\textbf{Ma all’altezza del 1506 già doveva essere in atto l’elaborazione del \textit{Furioso}, la cui stessa struttura è inconcepibile al di là di un senso dei rapporti teatrali, della finzione scenica, dello scambio tra illusione e realtà: e del resto si può sostenere che la stessa concezione dell’uomo e della vita di relazione che è alla base del poema risalga ad una diretta esperienza della teatralità, ad una implicita nozione del mondo come teatro. Per questo non sorprende in nessun modo il fatto che l’autore, proprio nel momento del suo più creativo impegno per il grande poema, si sia inserito in modo determinante nella contemporanea ricerca di una commedia volgare basata direttamente sul modello degli antichi, mirante a superare l’indeterminata ed eterogenea creatività del teatro cortigiano tardoquattrocentesco e a fissarsi in forme “regolari.”}\textsuperscript{126}

Ferroni’s observation on Ariosto’s passion for theatrical productions demonstrates a fresh insight on Ariosto’s literary works. Previously, Italian scholars had drawn a dividing line between Ariosto’s epic poem \textit{Orlando furioso}, considering it to be a major literary work, and his

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{124} Natali, \textit{Ludovico Ariosto}, 57-66.\textsuperscript{125} Russo, \textit{Compendio storico della letteratura italiana}, 204-205.\textsuperscript{126} Ferroni, \textit{Ariosto}, 49.}
other literary compositions, including the comedies, which they considered to be minor literary works. Ferroni’s statement, however, eliminates that line and points out, quite rightly, that Ariosto’s theatrical experiences—prior to composing his epic poem *Orlando furioso* (1506-1516) Ariosto had also participated as an actor in productions of classical plays—and his comedic writing coincide and feed into his elaboration of the epic poem. This is a remarkable observation because it eliminates the hierarchy of Ariosto’s literary works and views them all as equally interconnected. It also proposes to interpret Ariosto’s comedies from a new perspective.

In his dramatic compositions, Ariosto intentionally used Latin comedies in order to establish a continuum with the theatrical tradition of his time and, at the same time, enriched his own plays with references to contemporary events. Taking into account the kaleidoscopic representation of the intermingling of the two worlds—Latin Antiquity and the Italian present—Ferroni believes that Ariosto’s comedies attain an anthropological dimension, that is, they deal with cultural developments, social customs, and beliefs of sixteenth-century Ferrarese society.  

From the early years of the twentieth-century, Anglo-American scholars have demonstrated a great interest in Ariosto’s dramatic contributions toward the development of Renaissance regular comedy. Scholars such as Edmund Garratt Gardner, Joseph Spencer Kennard, Douglas Radcliff-Umstead, Edmond Beame, Leonard Sbrocchi, and Richard Andrews have examined Ariosto’s comedies in comparison with other erudite comedies produced during the sixteenth century and considered them to be historically valuable.

In his *The King of Court Poets*, published in 1906, the English scholar Edmund Garratt Gardner (1868-1935) drew from the extant correspondence of Ariosto with the Este family to describe Ariosto’s literary and administrative experiences. While discussing Ariosto’s dramatic compositions and performances, Gardner drew attention to the successful reception of Ariosto’s

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comedies among his contemporaries. In his view, Ariosto’s comedies immensely entertained sixteenth-century audience by offering references not only to the classical Latin world, but also to sixteenth-century Ferrara. While analyzing all of Ariosto’s play, Gardner singled out Ariosto’s last comedy, La Lena, for its accurate and realistic representation of “low” life in Ferrara. He wrote that “withal, the play is the most realistic of Ariosto’s comedies, and the most full of modern touches. It is, doubtless, an accurate study of low life in Ferrara in the twenties of the Cinquecento.”

Although his statement suggests that Gardner interpreted the content of the play literally and ignored the fact that the work was composed in the carnival spirit, Gardner’s monograph is significant because it offers a broad study in English of Ariosto’s literary works in the contexts of his life.

About twenty-six years after Gardner, another no less significant study of Ariosto’s comedies appeared in The Italian Theatre by Joseph Spencer Kennard (1859-1944). In this volume, Kennard examines the origin and development of Italian theatre. In his view, sixteenth-century Italian comedy is more than mere imitation of Latin comedy, but represents “a truly national theatre, reflecting social conditions, moral tendencies, sentiments, and customs in a clear and faithful picture of the society of the Renaissance;” he then points out that “the lack of originality of this comedy has been exaggerated.” While examining erudite comedies composed by sixteenth-century Italian playwrights, Kennard singles out Ariosto’s talent for theatrical compositions by calling him the father of erudite comedy by virtue of the fact that his comedies immensely influenced later erudite comedy in general. Much as Gardner had done, Kennard reveals his preference for Ariosto’s last comedy, La Lena; however, he does not follow Gardner’s view that La Lena offers “a study of low life in Ferrara.” In Kennard’s view, this comedy is “less allied to the classical models and richer in satire than other plays of Ariosto, the Lena is an original comedy notwithstanding the imitations from Terence and Plautus.” Moreover, it is “noteworthy for the author’s study of the characters,“ such as Fazio, Lena, and Pacifico. In Kennard’s opinion, it is through these characters that Ariosto masterly represents the

131 Kennard, *The Italian Theatre*, 111.
human vices and customs of the sixteenth century. Kennard’s reception of Ariosto’s plays shows that Ariosto’s contribution to the development of Italian theatre is praiseworthy because, apart from distancing himself from ancient Latin models, Ariosto develops characters that embody immoral habits of sixteenth-century Ferrarese society.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the American scholar Douglass Radcliff-Umstead (1940-1992) outlined the elements of erudite comedy present in Ariosto’s dramatic compositions that had been previously ignored. Unlike previous Anglo-American scholars, Radcliff-Umstead examined all of Ariosto’s comedies in line with Latin comedies and the medieval novelistic tradition. He also analyzed the structure of each of Ariosto’s comedies and paid particular attention to the elements realistically portraying contemporary society, namely, the references to local places, customs, and social abuses. Radcliff-Umstead also highlighted the representation of Fortune in Ariosto’s comedies, pointing out that Fortune is presented as a negative force that undermines man’s actions and shatters his dreams. In his view, Ariosto’s negative vision of Fortune drastically contrasts with the medieval interpretation of Fortune as “a special minister created by God to shift prosperity from one person, family, or nation to another so that it does not stay with any one of them for too long a time.”\footnote{Radcliff-Umstead, The Emergence of the Erudite Comedy, 64.} Radcliff-Umstead thus suggests that Ariosto’s representation of Fortune is a distinct trait of Renaissance erudite comedies since his negative view very much influenced the representation of Fortune in later sixteenth-century comedies. Radcliff-Umstead’s work on Ariosto’s comedies is innovative because it brings to light a new facet of the erudite comedies—their engagement with the very Renaissance debate on \textit{fortuna/virtù}.

Perhaps the greatest impact on English-language scholarship on Ariosto is evident in the collaborative work of an American and a Canadian scholar, Edmond M. Beame and Leonard G. Sbrocchi. Their \textit{The Comedies of Ariosto} (1975) provides the first English translation of all five of Ariosto’s comedies, complete with introduction and notes. Beame and Sbrocchi believe that Ariosto’s comedies stand as a commentary on the highly mannered, sophisticated Italian urban society of the sixteenth century. They admire Ariosto’s genuine talents to parody his society with a mixture of seriousness and levity that reveals its immorality. The availability of Ariosto’s
comedies in English has allowed for a quantum leap in English-language scholarship on Ariosto’s plays and, by extension, on Italian Renaissance theatre.

One of the volumes that followed was *Scripts and Scenarios* by the British scholar Richard Andrews (1993). In his analysis of Italian play scripts and productions, Andrews examines the development of regular comedy in sixteenth-century Italy focusing on theatrical techniques and devices. When examining Ariosto’s plays, Andrews notes a clear development in his use of dramatic techniques. He points out that Ariosto’s first play, *La Cassaria*, does not stray much from the classical models. It closely resembles a conventional use of Roman social patterns: two young men wish to buy two slave-girls from a procurer; their slaves or servants, therefore, play tricks on the procurer or the young men’s fathers to extract money in order to free the slave-girls. This comedy, therefore, does not offer any new theatrical techniques or devices that distinctly differ from that of Latin comedies.

Ariosto’s next play, *I Suppositi*, takes a first step away from classical models. By setting the play in a contemporary Italian city, Ferrara, Ariosto abandons Latin social conventions—pimps selling virgin slave girls—and introduces elements reflecting contemporary life, for instance, a travelling student who falls in love with a respected Ferrarese girl. Although the plot of *I Suppositi* still draws much from Latin comedies—the exchange of identity recalls Plautus’ *Captivi* and Terence’s *Eunuchus*—it also contains Boccaccian elements in the representation of an illicit seduction being regularized by marriage. Along with that, Ariosto enriches this comedy with mildly satirical references to general social and administrative conditions of his time.

Andrews then points out that Ariosto’s incomplete comedy, *I Studenti*, demonstrates the next stage of development after *I Suppositi*. Like *I Suppositi*, the plot of this comedy revolves around false identities; however, the play also utilizes a chain of deceptions whereby characters, while pretending to be someone else, unintentionally confuse and distress others. This innovation—the use of a chain of deceptions—constitutes the play’s main source of entertainment.

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In other plays, such as *Il Negromante* and *La Lena*, Ariosto makes progress in extending his theatrical techniques and saturating his comedies with satire. In *Il Negromante*, and unlike in his other comedies, Ariosto assigns a prominent role to a single villain, the Astrologer, who represents a real target of satire. In Andrews’s view, Ariosto expresses his disbelief in the occult arts by allowing a servant—a lower-class figure—to undermine the Astrologer’s pretence. Andrews also notes that in *Il Negromante* Ariosto experiments with the structure of comedy by making characters act or speak simultaneously but independently, thus giving the audience a double focus. For instance, in Act III, scenes 2 and 3, the Astrologer sends his servant Nibbio away so that he does not interfere with his master’s conversation with his employers. While Nibbio is in a corner of the stage he offers “a string of sarcastic asides on what his master is really up to, so the audience has to switch back and forth between him and the other two characters on stage;” Nibbio’s comments at the side of the stage thus ensure that the audience understands that deception is being practised. This is the first play in which Ariosto uses the device of theatrical asides and does so several times with great success.

In his final comedy, *La Lena*, Ariosto introduces at least three new theatrical techniques. The first is the accumulation of obstacles, suspense, and utter confusions that makes the play more unpredictable and thus much more “amusing.” The second technique is the use of satire targeted mainly at officials in the ducal administration. Andrews notes that “The atmosphere in the Ferrarese court must have been quite relaxed in the late 1520s if Ariosto could get away with attacking people whose authority came from the Duke himself, even if they are low-grade officials taking the law into their own hands.” The third new technique identified by Andrews is the introduction of characters such as Lena, Corbolo, Flavio, Fazio, and Pacifico whose behaviour is basically immoral, thus further exemplifying the crisis in values in contemporary Ferrara.

Andrews’s analysis of Ariosto’s comedies thus demonstrates that Ariosto progressively introduced several new theatrical techniques that had not been identified by previous scholars.
and thus contributed significantly to the technical development of sixteenth-century Italian theatre.

Twentieth-century scholarship on Ariosto’s dramatic compositions has brought to light several new aspects of his works. While agreeing with previous scholarship that his comedies are composed in line with classical antecedents and enriched with elements from the medieval novelistic tradition, modern scholars have also pointed out very clearly how these plays realistically represent sixteenth-century Ferrarese society. They have also brought to light Ariosto’s innovative contribution to the Renaissance debate on fortuna/virtù, a contribution he made by actually bringing to the stage and visualizing, for an audience, his own negative understanding of this iconic Renaissance crux. Lastly, modern scholars have pointed out, quite clearly, Ariosto’s innovations in the craft of theatre by virtue of his introduction of new dramatic techniques and their influence on subsequent works.

None of these scholars, however, has discussed the elements of carnivalesque subversion that Ariosto used in order to critique both the overly poor living conditions of the marginalised sectors of Ferrarese society and the corruption of ducal officials, something that he did in the hope of reforming society. Some examples of the carnivalesque subversion have been briefly mentioned in the first half of this chapter in order to demonstrate Ariosto’s innovations in his comedies, but much more needs to be said about this “subversion” technique. Such an analysis will be carried out in the following chapters of this thesis using the Bakhtinian theory of carnival as its guiding theoretical principle.
Chapter 2

Carnivalesque Forms and Elements of Subversion in Ariosto’s Comedies

This chapter will examine carnivalesque forms and elements of subversion in Ludovico Ariosto’s five extant plays by applying Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of carnival. It will begin with a summary of Bakhtinian theory of carnivalesque and then apply it to the dramatist’s texts. This constitutes a new way of interpreting Ariosto’s works for the theatre through the prism of the carnival spirit—an approach that, in addition to highlighting some neglected aspects of the plays, will serve to underline Ariosto’s intentions to entertain his audiences, while also trying to reform the society of his day. In order to establish a basis for the detailed analysis of Ariosto’s plays along these lines, however, it is important first to review Bakhtin’s theory of carnival.

a) Bakhtin’s Theory of Carnival

While tracing the development of folk humour in early European countries by studying its early manifestations in ancient and medieval times, Mikhail Bakhtin\(^\text{140}\) defined three distinct forms of

\(^{140}\) Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) was a Russian philosopher, semiotician, and literary scholar. He was born in Orel, south of Moscow, in a cultured family of liberal views. Bakhtin earned a degree in classics and philology at the University of Petrograd (1913-18). After graduation, he worked as a schoolteacher in Nevel, a small town in western Russia and participated in lecture series and study circles focused on the relationship between philosophy, religion, and politics. In 1929, Bakhtin was arrested, as were many other intellectuals in the early Stalinist years. He was charged with conspiracy against the Soviet regime in his alleged activity in the underground Russian Orthodox Church and was sentenced to ten years on the Solovetsky Islands, a death camp in the Soviet Far North. Because of his illness and thanks to the intervention of influential friends, his sentence was commuted to six years of internal exile in Kazakhstan. While in exile, Bakhtin began working on his theory of the novel that was later completed and published in various essays such as “Slovo v romane” (Discourse in the novel), “Iz predystorii romannogo slovo” (From the prehistory of novelistic discourse), and “Epos i roman” (Epic and novel), just to name a few. Bakhtin also conducted research on his major work on Rabelais that was then submitted as his doctoral dissertation to the Gorky Institute of World Literature in Moscow in 1941. His dissertation Rabelais and his World, that touches on the celebration of carnival and sexuality, utopian and philosophical anarchism was viewed as a scandalous work. With this dissertation, Bakhtin was granted a degree, but it was not the doktorat. Twenty-four years later, his dissertation was published as a book. In 1936, Bakhtin took up a professorship at the remote Mordovia State Teachers College in Saransk, east of Moscow. There he taught courses in Russian and world literature for several years. In 1963, he
humorous popular culture: ritual spectacles, comic verbal compositions, and various types of billingsgate speech, or coarse and abusive language. Ritual spectacles, as he defines them, consist of carnival pageants and comic performances of the marketplace. These festivities and celebrations played a significant role in the life of medieval men and women, allowing them to build a second world and a second life outside officialdom for a certain period of time, namely, carnival, which in the liturgical calendar precedes Lent. While people were participating in the carnival celebration they actually lived in it and it became part of their lives. During that time people followed a utopian ideology. They enjoyed freedom, equality, and abundance in all aspects of life because carnival celebrated temporary freedom from the established order and temporarily suspended all hierarchical ranks, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. They also enjoyed a special type of verbal and bodily communication that would have been impossible in everyday life. This special form of speech and gestures was influenced by the carnival spirit; it was frank and free of the established norms of etiquette and decency that were enforced at other times of the year. In addition, people adapted a peculiar idiom made up of subversive forms and symbols characterized by an “inside-out” and/or “topsy-turvy” nature, and this had the effect of arousing laughter in the participants. This type of carnival laughter is generally not only festive, but also ambivalent, since it derides and mocks established norms and customs while, at the same time, it renews and celebrates life. It is, thus, an essential characteristic of the true celebration of change and renewal.\[^{141}\]

This form of folk humour characteristic of carnival celebrations is also evident in the Renaissance. For instance, carnival was celebrated each year in sixteenth-century Ferrara, as it was in other Italian cities. Ariosto composed all his plays for performance at carnival time and enriched them extensively with carnivalesque forms of speech, gestures, and other elements that reflected the “inside-out” and/or “topsy-turvy” dualism identified by Bakhtin. These particular

\[^{141}\] Bakhtin, Rabelais and his World, 1-11.
forms, abundantly present in Ariosto’s plays, will be examined in this chapter with the intention of offering a new way to view Ariosto’s dramatic compositions, that is, through the prism of the carnival theory. And this, in turn, will highlight the ambivalent messages conveyed by the texts.

The second form of folk humour identified by Bakhtin refers to comic verbal compositions in both Latin and the vernacular. Medieval comic literature was infused with carnival spirit and made constant use of carnival forms and images. It also sought to arouse carnival laughter by suggesting or voicing ambivalent messages. Latin comic compositions derided official and religious ideologies, and mocked the lofty philosophy of medieval scholarly thought. For instance, the *Coena Cypriani* (Cyprian’s supper), possibly datable to the fifth-sixth centuries, is infused with carnival spirit as it presents a carnivalesque parody of the Scriptures. In the seventh century, Vergilius Maro Grammaticus (also known as Virgil the Grammarian), on the other hand, offered a parody of the scholarly wisdom and scientific approaches typical of the early Middle Ages. There was also a vast production of comical liturgies that derided every ecclesiastical cult and many serious Church teachings, as well as parodies of Gospel readings, sacred prayers, litanies, hymns, and psalms. A large quantity of medieval comic texts was also composed in the vernacular. Similar to the Latin compositions, some of these texts offered a parody of prayers, sermons, Christmas carols, and legends of the saints, while other vernacular compositions were saturated with a secular parody of feudal society and its life-style.¹⁴² Both the Latin and vernacular comic texts were strongly influenced by the carnival tradition and reflected a temporary suspension of normal ecclesiastical and secular regulations. While this literature remained more or less an expression of popular carnival spirit, it also played a significant role in the development of later, more refined literary compositions such as Ariosto’s comedies.

The third form of folk humour described by Bakhtin consists of varieties of billingsgate language—so named from the Billingsgate market in London that provides the metonym for this type of speech—such as abusive and insulting words, profanities and oaths, and indecent expressions.¹⁴³ Billingsgate speech was adapted for carnival celebrations as an informal style of communication to portray the spirit of carnival. As will be seen in the following chapter, Ariosto

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¹⁴³ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 16-17.
followed this tradition and endowed his plays with billingsgate expressions so as to make his works reflect and adhere to the carnival celebration in which they were composed and performed.

In addition to the three basic forms of the culture of folk humour, Bakhtin formulated the concept of grotesque realism based on the “material bodily principle”—evident in Renaissance literature and in Rabelais’s works in particular in images of the human body with its food, drink, bodily dregs, and impurities.144 Seeing that images of the human body represented in an exaggerated form are abundantly present in Rabelais’s work and that similar elements are readily found in the works of writers such as Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375), Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616), and William Shakespeare (1564-1616), Bakhtin proposed to view them as the heritage of that peculiar aesthetic concept pertaining to the folk culture of humour. He then suggested calling such literary phenomena “grotesque realism.”

In grotesque realism the material bodily principle is expressed in carnival spirit, that is, bodily images portray positive, festive, and utopian aspects of human life. They are associated with all people and establish a deep connection between human beings and the world. They are, therefore, usually represented in exaggerated and immeasurable forms. Moreover, the exaggerated forms of images of the body also refer to fertility, growth, renewal, and abundance, all indispensable characteristics of the carnival celebration of life.

According to Bakhtin’s theory, the main principle of grotesque realism is degradation, the transferring of all that is elevated, spiritual, ideal, and abstract from the higher level of the cosmic, the spirit, and the mind, to the lower one, that is, to the earthly level of matter and the lower parts of the body. The movements “upward” and “downward” have an absolute and strictly topographical meaning, where “upward” connotes heaven and “downward” connotes earth. In the cosmic aspect, earth has an ambivalent meaning: it is an element that “devours, swallows up (the grave), but at the same time it is also an element of birth and rebirth (the

144 François Rabelais (c.1499-1553) was an eminent humanist scholar and a doctor. Although he translated and published the works of Hippocrates and Galen, his fame rests on the five comic narratives known collectively as Gargantua and Pantagruel. They include his masterpieces Pantagruel (1532) and Gargantua (1534) as well as Le Tiers Livre (1546).
womb).”\textsuperscript{145} In the bodily aspect, “upward” refers to the upper parts of the body: the head, the mouth, and the breast and “downward” is associated with the lower parts of the body: the belly, the genital organs, and the buttocks. Therefore, degradation or debasement means coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time. To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better. To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth. Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one. To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place. Grotesque realism knows no other lower level; it is the fruitful earth and the womb. It is always conceiving.\textsuperscript{146}

This concept of grotesque realism is essential in understanding and interpreting not only the material bodily principle, but also the use of abusive language in literature. Verbal abuse, oaths, curses, and indecent expressions have a direct link with bodily images and the concept of degradation. Ariosto substantially used abusive language in his plays in order to align his compositions with the carnival spirit. The use of this particular language with reference to the grotesque realism evident in his comedies will be examined in the third chapter.

The three forms of folk humour—ritual spectacles, comic verbal compositions, various types of the billingsgate speech—and the concept of grotesque realism are substantially interwoven with each other. The concept of grotesque realism would remain vague without considering the three forms of folk humour and vice versa. Therefore, in examining the carnivalesque forms and the elements of subversion in Ariosto’s plays, both the forms of folk humour and the concept of grotesque realism will be considered appropriate.

\textit{b) Classical Roman and Italian Sources in Ariosto’s Plays}

\textsuperscript{145} Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais and his World}, 21.
\textsuperscript{146} Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais and his World}, 21.
Ariosto’s plays are written in accordance with classical models and enriched both with themes from Boccaccio’s Decameron as well as with references to current events and customs in Ferrara. The striking influence of classical models is evident in each play. As with Roman comedies, they all have a single stage set: a public square with the houses of some of the characters in the play. All the plays begin with a prologue recited as a soliloquy and are divided into five acts arranged in the regular order of protasis (exposition in Acts I and II), epitasis (complication in Acts III and IV), and catastrophe (resolution in Act V) identified by the fourth-century Roman grammarian and rhetorician Aelius Donatus. The first two plays, La Cassaria and I Suppositi, were originally composed in prose, but then, in order to adhere to Roman practice, Ariosto versified them; the three later plays, Il Negromante, I Studenti, and La Lena, were instead composed directly in verse. Aside from structure and verse form, there are other important elements derived from ancient Roman comedies present in the content of Ariosto’s plays. All the plots of Ariosto’s comedies involve the urban middle class and their servants, and the events enacted represent private aspects of life touching the participants and their families. Ancient Roman comedies relied extensively on implausible intrigue, cross purposes, deceit, disguise, and mistaken identity, and so do most of Ariosto’s plays. The stock characters of classical comedy are also present in Ariosto’s plays: the helpless young lover, the miserly father, the cunning servants, the young noble girl who never shows up on stage, the cook, the pimp, the parasite, and the bawd.\textsuperscript{147} The presence of classical elements does not mean, however, that Ariosto’s plays are mere copies of classical models. They are, in fact, reflections of contemporary Ferrarese, not of ancient Roman society, and are composed in accordance with Cicero’s definition of comedy as reformulated by Aelius Donatus: “Comedy is an imitation of life, a mirror of manners, and an image of truth.”\textsuperscript{148} Ariosto’s plays thus reflect sixteenth-century Ferrarese society’s tastes, manners, and customs.

The court of Ferrara took a leading role in the production of plays by the ancient Roman dramatists Plautus (c. 254 BC-184 BC) and Terence (195/185-159 BC). About twenty-two separate productions of Roman comedies are recorded in Ferrara during the reign of Duke Ercole.

\textsuperscript{147} For a summary of classical stock characters, see Andrews, Scripts and Scenarios, 1-32; Herrick, Italian Comedy in the Renaissance, 1-71, and Norwood, Plautus and Terence, 1-28.

\textsuperscript{148} Cited in Andrews, Scripts and Scenarios, 29.
I (r. 1471-1505). These plays were performed in Italian translations and were accompanied by intermezzi presented between each act. When Ariosto composed his plays, he must have considered the audience’s knowledge of these classical models and thus purposefully adhered to them in order to provide his audience with a continuity of shared theatrical knowledge and tastes from the Plauto-Terentian exemplars to his own plays.

Alongside classical Roman models, Ariosto also drew upon more recent, Italian sources. He enriched his plays with themes from the novella or short-story tradition best exemplified by Boccaccio’s Decameron, as well as from recent events or contemporary customs, all in an attempt to make his plays reflect current norms, manners, and tastes. Because his plays were mounted during the carnival season, Ariosto also filled them with carnivalesque elements. This allowed his audience not only to participate in the current atmosphere of festivity and amusement, but also to share vicariously in the trickery or immorality acted out on stage, ever confident in a return to normality in the final act.

c) Carnivalesque Subversion and Elements of Grotesque Realism Displayed Through Servants and Masters

The use of a peculiar idiom of forms and symbols characterized by an “inside-out” and/or a “topsy-turvy” view of the world, the so-called element of subversion, is apparent in all of Ariosto’s plays. It is masterfully shown through the exchange of roles between the servants and their masters and between the marginalised and the dominant sectors of Ferrarese society. In Ariosto’s plays the shrewd and resourceful servants resemble classical prototypes in their ability to assist their young masters, but they also manifest additional distinctive traits and skills developed under the influence of carnival spirit. They have the ability to work independently, in pairs and in groups, and are capable of controlling and manipulating their masters, thus creating an ethos peculiar to carnival. In La Cassaria, the servants Volpino and Fulcio demonstrate a

natural talent for directing and controlling the actions of what is often a play within a play.\textsuperscript{150} With their help, their young masters Erofilo and Caridoro are able to free their beloveds from the pimp Lucrano and satisfy their carnal desires. It is also important to note, however, that while Volpino helps the young masters Erofilo and Caridoro, he also demonstrates his distinctive ability to take control of his young masters and act as if he were their master. In Act II, 1, while Volpino explains his scheme to the two youths, he interrogates Erofilo with such a superior tone that the young master seems to be his servant, and not vice versa:

\begin{verbatim}
VOLP. Non t’ho detto che di man del Nebbia facessi opera di avere le chiavi de la camera di tuo padre?
EROF. L’ho fatto.
VOLP. E che togliessi quella cassa che ti mostrai?
EROF. T’ho obedito.
VOLP. E che mandassi for di casa tutti li famigli?
EROF. Così ho fatto.
VOLP. E più di tutti li altri el Nebbia?
EROF. Non ho lassata cosa che mi abbi detta. (II.1)\textsuperscript{151}
\end{verbatim}

In the same manner, Volpino issues orders to his master’s friend, Caridoro:

\begin{verbatim}
VOLP. Tu, Caridoro, come il ruffian sia preso, potrai fornire il desiderio tuo per te medesimo; che mentre li toi servi meneranno Lucrano prigione, tu farai de la tua Corisca el piacer tuo. (II.1)
\end{verbatim}

In \textit{La Cassaria} the young masters’ desire to satisfy their sexual needs is so strong that it clouds their rational thinking so much so that they submissively comply with Volpino’s orders and willingly allow the servant to become their master. In sixteenth-century society this type of behaviour would not have been permissible since it would have violated the hierarchy of social status. Volpino’s actions might thus have been interpreted as arrogant and daring, and the wealthy young men’s submissiveness and obedience might have looked weak and inappropriate to the point of being unacceptable. However, if Volpino’s and the young master’s actions are

\begin{verbatim}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{150} Ferroni, \textit{Ariosto}, 52. Ferroni explains that Volpino and Fulcio “manifestano insistentemente una disposizione – ‘registica’, ponendosi in primo come costruttori di imbrogli e di giochi che danno movimento alla commedia.”
\textsuperscript{151} All references to Ariosto’s plays will be given in parentheses in the text and will be taken from Cesare Segre’s edition of the \textit{Commedie} (1976), excluding \textit{I Studenti} because the Segre’s edition does not contain it. To examine \textit{I Studenti}, Aldo Vallone’s critical edition of \textit{Opere minori} (1964) is used.
\end{verbatim}
seen through the prism of carnival spirit, then their behaviour can be interpreted not as unacceptable, but as humorous and part of the carnivalesque subversions that suspend established hierarchy and create a second world where everything is possible while carnival lasts.

A similar act of subversion and suspension of hierarchical structures is displayed in *I Suppositi* and in the incomplete play *I Studenti*. In *I Suppositi* Erostrato, a young master driven by a strong carnal desire deliberately debases himself in order to attain his ends. He does so by exchanging identity with his servant Dulippo. Dressed as a servant, Erostrato gains employment as Damone’s servant, while Dulippo, pretending to be the son of a wealthy Sicilian merchant, attends university and lives the life of a wealthy young man. This subversion of personal identities and ranks allows Erostrato to satisfy his carnal desires with Damone’s daughter, Polinesta, while the carnivalesque pretence remains undiscovered. In *I Studenti*, the servant Accursio suggests his young master Eurialo provide lodging in his house for his beloved Ippolita, who has unexpectedly arrived in Ferrara with Veronese, while Eurialo’s father is away. In order to conceal their presence in the house, Accursio offers to tell the other servants in the house that the two newly arrived women are Flamminia, the daughter of Doctor Lazaro, and Lucrezia, her mother. In so doing, Accursio and Eurialo commit an act of subversion of hierarchical ranks since both Ippolita and Veronese are, in fact, of humble origin and both work as servants in Lazaro’s house. In pretending to be women of higher social status, Ippolita and Veronese subvert and undermine standard norms and customs of Ferrarese society.

In their efforts to subvert social norms, servants occasionally work in pairs and in groups. In *La Cassaria*, Volpino and Fulcio alternately help their young masters achieve their goals. First Volpino takes control of the actions: he conceives a scheme to liberate the young women Eulalia and Corisca, the beloveds of Erofilo and Caridoro, from the pimp Lucrano; then he orders the young masters to carry out the scheme; he then helps the young masters follow the plan and free Eulalia. However, when Crisobolo, Volpino’s old master and Erofilo’s father, unexpectedly returns home, Volpino loses his ability to direct the scheme and admits this weakness to Fulcio. At this point Fulcio gladly substitutes for Volpino; he alters Volpino’s plan and brings it to a successful conclusion. He manages to free Corisca, convinces Crisobolo to pay the pimp, and releases Volpino from imprisonment. Thus both Volpino and Fulcio are portrayed as shrewd servants who are able to work together in order to assist their masters.
Alongside Volpino and Fulcio, there are a number of other, minor servants in this play. These may well be one of Ariosto’s innovations since in classical plays the number of servants was usually very limited.\textsuperscript{152} Ariosto’s minor servants also demonstrate their ability to work together to assist each other and undermine social norms. When a group of Erofilo’s servants encounter Trappola dressed as a wealthy merchant and escorting Eulalia down the road, they erroneously assume he is kidnapping her. Responding spontaneously to their mistaken assumption, they react as a cohesive group to abuse him verbally and physically, beat him up, and free Eulalia.

CORB. Eulalia, andiamo a trovare Erofilo tuo.
GIAND. Lassa, se no ch’io ...
TRAP. Così se assassinano i forestieri?
GIAND. Se tu non taci, ti caccio li occhi.
TRAP. Voi credete a questo modo, ribaldi? ... Aiuto, aiuto!
GIAND. Spezzali el capo, càvali la lingua.
TRAP. A questo modo, traditori, m’avete tolto la mia femina?
GIAND. Andiamoci con Dio, e lassamolo gracchiare.
TRAP. Che farò, miserò? Se dovessi ben morire, vo’ seguitarli per vedere ove la menano.
GIAND. Se tu non ritorni, ti farò più pezzi di cotesta tua testaccia, che non si fe’ mai di vetro. Se tu ci pretendi aver ragione, lassati veder domani all’uffizio de’ doganieri.
TRAP. – Son mal condotto: m’hàn tolta la femina, m’hanno gettato nel fango, stracciato la veste e tutto pesto il viso.— (III.5)

In examining the role of the servants in the play, Antonio De Luca notes that “Il carattere di Fulcio assume sempre più i connotati che erano stati di Volpino, tanto che, per quanto riguarda la funzione, i due possono essere considerati un solo personaggio esemplificato nella prospettiva del fallimento prima, poi della riuscita.”\textsuperscript{153} These two servants may indeed be considered as one character since they complement each other. However, the presence of a large number of servants in this play suggests that all the servants, including Volpino and Fulcio, can be viewed as representatives of a single character that embodies the universal carnivalesque servant who is not only capable of taking over his master’s role, as has been shown in the scene between

\textsuperscript{152} Grabher, \textit{Sul teatro dell’Ariosto}, 46.
\textsuperscript{153} DeLuca, “La prima redazione della “Cassaria”,” 229.
Volpino and young masters, but also of mocking, deriding, cheating, degrading, and debasing his master while carnival lasts.

The obvious element of degrading and debasing is shown in the scene when Trappola, a servant, is dressed up by Volpino in Crisobolo’s clothes.\textsuperscript{154} Trappola’s social status does not permit him to wear the clothes of wealthy merchants since it would misrepresent him and would be contrary not only to contemporary social norms, but also to current sumptuary laws. Therefore, by clothing a servant in his master’s robes Volpino undermines the norms and customs of his time. Hierarchical boundaries are further transgressed when Trappola, dressed up as a wealthy merchant, is beaten up, verbally abused, and thrown in the mud by several servants. In so doing, the underlings not only brutally degrade a superior by abusing him verbally and physically, but also, figuratively speaking, blend him with mud and dirt. This scene clearly exhibits an element of grotesque realism; it portrays a movement downward associated with earth. This act of debasing should not be interpreted as a violent act against the higher echelons of society with an intention to liberate an oppressed sector of society, but rather as a carnivalesque moment in which members of the lower ranks of society debase and degrade those of the higher ranks, thereby performing and celebrating a sort of renewal and renascence of the imposed order.

In Ariosto’s plays servants often criticise their old masters for being excessively tight-fisted and reproach their young masters for being indecisive, irrational, and impulsive, much as they do in classical Plauto-Terentian comedy. In so doing, they display yet another characteristic influenced by the carnival spirit, that is, their freedom to criticise authority, whether that be by provoking their old masters, nagging their young masters, or generally criticising government officials for their corruption. In short, in this carnivalesque atmosphere servants reveal themselves capable of deriding the weaknesses or chastising the corruption they note in the establishment, whether that be society, the State, or the Church. Their comments and actions thus serve to establish a connection between everyday life in the city and the rarified atmosphere of the court.

\textsuperscript{154} Ariosto, \textit{Commedie}, 18.
This social critique levelled by the servants against established authority is discernible in three of Ariosto’s plays. In La Cassaria, Volpino urges his old master to inform the audience about corrupt government officials. He then tries to persuade Crisobolo to go one step further and inform the government that the procurer Lucrano has stolen the coffer from Crisobolo’s house and demand that the governor punish the procurer. Lacking better evidence and knowing that the authorities are more likely to heed the wicked than the just, Crisobolo comments:

CRISOB. Se non aven meglio di cotesto, siàn forniti. A chi dánno più credito i gran maestri in questo tempo, e più favore, che alli ruffiani? e chi più beffano, che gli uomini costumati e da bene? a chi tendono più insidie, che alli miei pari, che hanno fama d’esser ricchi e denarosi? (IV.2)

Subsequently Crisobolo refuses to go to the podestà explaining that such action would be fruitless because of the official’s basic disinterest in carrying out his duties:

CRISOB. Se per parlare al Bassà andassimo ora, seria l’andata vana: o che trovassimo che cenar vorrebbe, o che giocarebbe o a carte o a dadi, o che stanco da le faccende del giorno si vorria stare in ozio. Non so io l’usanza di questi che ci reggono, che quando più soli sono e stannosi a grattar la pancia, vogliono demostrare aver più occupazione: fanno stare un servo alla porta, e che li giuocatori, li ruffiani, li cinedi introduca, e dia agli onesti cittadini e virtuosi uomini repulsa? (IV.2)

In Il Negromante the servant Temolo openly derides the corrupt authorities and compares them to animals, in particular to a wolf, a fox, a kite, and a donkey:

TEM. Non vedete voi, che subito un divien podestade, commissario, proveditore, gabelliere, giudice, notaio, pagator de li stipendii, che li costumi umani lascia, e prendeli o di lupo o di volpe o di alcun nibio?
FAZIO. Cotesto è vero.
TEM. E tosto ch’un d’ignobile grado vien consigliere o secretario, e che di commandar a gli altri ha ufficio, non è vero anco che diventa un asino?
FAZIO. Verissimo. (I.3)
In *La Lena*, the servant Corbolo explicitly mocks the duke’s corrupt officials. Corbolo goes to the market to purchase a pair of plump pheasants, but cannot find any. On his way home from the market he meets the duke’s gamekeepers and one of them offers to sell him a pair of plump pheasants poached from the duke’s hunting reserve. Corbolo gladly accepts the offer and promises not to disclose the source to anyone. However, on his way to see Lena, Corbolo, in an aside, informs the audience about the duke’s corrupt officials.

CORB. (E gli prometto la mia fede d’essere secrete; ma mi vien voglia di ridere: che ’l Signor fa con tanta diligenzia e con gride e con pene si terribili guardar la sua campagna; e li medesimi che n’hanno cura, son quei che la rubano.)

LENA Spiccati, che spiccati ti sia l’anima!

CORB. (Non ponno a nozze et a conviti publici li fagiani apparir sopra le tavole, che le gridi ci sono; e ne le camere con puttane i bertoni se li mangiano. Questi arrosto, e ’l cappone ho fatto cuocere lesso; e qui nel canestro caldi arrecoli. Ecco la Lena.) (II.3)

Corbolo also leads his old master Ilario to express his opinion about corrupt authorities. When he urges Ilario to go to the authorities to seek help against the criminals who chased his son Flavio and stole his clothes, the old man refuses to do so and explains that:

ILAR. ... Or sia ancor ch’io vada al duca, e contigli il caso; che farà, se non rimettermi al podestade? E ’l podestade subito m’avrà gli occhi alle mani; e non vedendoci l’offerta, mostrerà che da far abbia maggior faccende: e se non avrà indizii, o testimoni, mi terrà una bestia. Appresso, chi vuoi tu pensar che siano li malfattori, se non li medesimi, che per pigliar li malfattor si pagano? Col cavaller de i quali o contestabile, il podestà fa a parte; e tutti rubano. (III.2)
All these examples show the temporary suspension of imposed hierarchy. The servants freely deride and mock the higher strata of society and incite their masters to express their views on the corruption that pervades the administration of the state.

In summarising this analysis of the elements of subversion evident in the exchange of roles between the servants and their masters in Ariosto’s plays, it is essential to highlight that the “topsy-turvy” element reveals the carnivalesque roles of the servants. These characters in Ariosto’s plays are similar to their classical prototypes—they are shrewd, cunning, and loyal to their masters, but they also supervise and substitute for their masters. They criticise, deride, and mock not only their masters, but also other members of society. In so doing, they play an indispensable role in establishing a connection between the city and the court, the working class and the ruling class, the poor and the rich.

*d) Carnivalesque Subversion Displayed Through a Relationship Between the Marginalised and Wealthy Sectors of Society*

An element of subversion is also evident in the relationship between the marginalised and the wealthy sectors of Ferrarese society. In the play *Il Negromante*, an exiled Jew from Castile, who calls himself a necromancer, mocks, derides, and degrades the local ruling class. He does so while pretending to be a philosopher, an alchemist, a doctor, an astrologer, a magician, and a conjurer of spirits. In reality, however, he is a swindler with an infernal ability to detect human vices, follies, lewdness, and wickedness in his potential victims and to mercilessly swindle them out of their riches. In order to make a living, he travels from one place to another swindling people, never at a loss for a victim since foolish people reside in every country. He easily defrauds wealthy people with an assistance of his servant Nibbio, who characterizes his master as follows:

**NIB.** Per certo, questa è pur gran confidenzia
che mastro Iachelino ha in sé medesimo,
che mal sapendo leggere e mal scrivere
faccia professio ne di filosofo,
d’alchimista, di medico, di astrologo,
di mago, e di scongiurator di spiriti;
e sa di queste e de l’alte scienzie
che sa l’asino e ’l bue di sonar gli organi;
bencó si faccia nominar lo astrologo
per eccellenzia, si come Virgilio
il poeta, e Aristotele il filosofo;
ma con un viso più che marmo immobile,
ciance, menzogne, e non con altra industria,
aggira et aviluppa il capo a gli uomini;
e gode, e fa godere a me (aiutandoci
la sciocchezza, che al mondo è in abbondanzia)
l’altrui ricchezze. Andiamo come zingari
di paese in paese; e le vestigie
sue tuttavia, dovunque passa, restano,
ricordi di terra in terra, per nascondersi,
si che di terra in terra, per nascondersi,
si muta nome, abito, lingua e patria.
Or è Giovanni, or Piero: quando fingesi
greco, quando d’Egitto, quando d’Africa;
et è, per dire il ver, giudeo d’origine,
di quei che fur cacciati di Castilia.
Sarebbe lungo a contar quanti nobili,
quant plebei, quanti donne, quanti uomini,
ha giuntati e rubati, quanti povere
ha disfatte, quanti adulterìi
contaminare, or mostrando che gravide
volesse far le maritate sterili,
or le suspizioni e le discordie
spiegere che tra mariti e mogli nascono.
Or ha in pié questo gentiluomo, e beccalo
meglio che frate mai facesse vedova. (II.1)

To create this character-type Ariosto adapted the traditional figure of the mystifier from classical
Antiquity that in the Renaissance became the magus, astrologer, alchemist, and dabbler in occult
arts and then enhanced it with traits pertaining to sorcerers and swindlers. In so doing, Ariosto
drew on the narrative tradition of novella collections and on contemporary life.¹⁵⁵

The necromancer as a character-type appears in many plays throughout the sixteenth
century. He is part of that sixteenth-century society that strongly believed in and relied on
astrology, necromancy, and demonology. Magic, in fact, played a prominent role in all aspects of

¹⁵⁵ Grabher, *Sul teatro dell’Ariosto*, 77-82; Griffin, *Ludovico Ariosto*, 34-35; Radcliff-Umstead, “The Sorcerer in
Italian Renaissance Comedy,” 73-98; Bianchi, “The Theatre of Ariosto,” 176-194; Beecher, “Intrigues and
Trickster: the Manifestations of an Archetype in the Comedy of the Renaissance,” 53-72.
contemporary life. Rulers, prelates, and even popes such as Julius II Della Rovere (r. 1503-1513) and Leo X de’ Medici (r. 1513-1521) had personal astrologers in their courts and consulted with them. The Church itself did not consider astrology to be completely incompatible with Christianity; for example, the twelve signs of the zodiac were believed to be associated with the twelve apostles. Not surprisingly, people might seek advice either from a priest or from an astrologer, or both. In Ferrara, Duke Ercole I (r. 1471-1505) and his son Duke Alfonso I (r. 1505-1534) often relied on the prophecies voiced by Carlo Sosena, a local cleric and astrologer, who performed enchantments and conjurations with the help of a spirit that he supposedly kept imprisoned within his own body.156

In this cultural climate, the occult arts were the subject of philosophical speculation. It was believed that gifted practitioners of the occult arts—witchcraft, astrology, divination, alchemy, and also Kabala—could bring about physical transformation of reality and in so doing command and control Nature. To demonstrate a complete rejection and reliance on diabolical demons—in the Christian world, belief in spirits betrayed a fear of Satan and threatened eternal damnation—the Florentine Neo-Platonic philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) postulated the existence of a purified and natural magic that invoked the assistance of good spirits. In Ficino’s view, one could perform works of magic through a process of contemplation and spiritual elevation climaxing in union with God. Ficino’s contemporary, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) studied the esoteric Hebrew tradition of the Kabala and believed that it would help him decipher the angelic and divine names that, in turn, would explain the system of the entire animate universe. Pico theorised that an individual could be in charge of the ascent of his/her soul through contemplation to a higher spiritual level. Both Ficino and Pico believed that human beings were special creatures who held an intermediate position on the ladder of creation between angels and beasts and that they had the capacity to raise themselves to heavenly heights. This view of human beings as quasi demi-gods influenced considerably the general social

acceptance of magical powers and magicians who were believed to be capable of manipulating the occult bonds that united the whole of Creation.  

This general acceptance of the magical arts led to the development and flourishing of a pseudo-magical criminal sub-culture represented by charlatans, alchemists, enchanters, necromancers, and conjurors of spirits. Such figures effortlessly took advantage of gullible clients eager to amass fortunes or to acquire political power and defrauded them relentlessly. In *Il Negromante*, Ariosto depicted a representative of this sub-culture through the carnivalesque element of subversion in order to portray the real-life misadventures of credulous individuals who patronized such charlatans.

In the play the central role of the necromancer is already announced by the title. The charlatan Iachelino travels about the Mediterranean world assuming different names and nationalities to disguise his true identity. Leading a gypsy’s life, he pretends to be Greek, Egyptian, or African as the occasion warrants. Taking advantage of credulous employers, he amasses a considerable fortune while playing the part of an astrologer, a physician (in the first version of the play, Iachelino is known as a physician of magical medicine), and a conjurer of spirits. The fact that Iachelino is actually a Jew expelled from Castile turns his pretence into the carnival element of subversion on stage. Though a member of a marginalised sector of society on two accounts—as a Jew and as an exile—, Iachelino displays extraordinary self-confidence and a profound knowledge of human psychology, two factors that he then uses to his advantage in order to manipulate, control, mock, and deride the wealthy segment of society, not without the help, it should be noted, of a fair amount of folly and the carnival season.

Massimo, Cintio, and Camillo, members of the wealthy class and representatives of the higher sector of society, hire the necromancer to solve their problems. The well-to-do merchant

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Massimo asks him to heal his foster-son Cintio from apparent impotence so that the young man might fulfill his marital duties. A few months earlier Cintio had married Emilia, the daughter of a very wealthy man in the city, but to date he still had to be intimate with her. The actual reason for this abstinence is not impotence, but the fact that Cintio has already been married in a clandestine ceremony to another woman, Lavinia, and wishes to remain faithful to her. By feigning impotence, Cintio hopes that his marriage with Emilia will be dissolved. Unaware of Cintio’s secret first marriage and of his plan to undo his public second marriage, his step-father Massimo hires the necromancer to treat Cintio’s, so to speak, problem. Cintio, on the other hand, beseeches the necromancer not to disclose his ruse to his foster father, but to tell him instead that the young man’s impotence is untreatable. Cintio is unwilling to reveal the truth about his previous marriage because he fears that his foster father would be upset at him for having secretly married a young woman of humble origin. Cintio’s plan is to continue the pretence until his foster father passes away. While all of this is going on, Camillo, a wealthy young man in love with Emilia, begs the necromancer Iachelino to apply his magical arts to the dissolution of Cintio’s marriage with Emilia in the hope that he (Camillo) would then be able to marry her, in spite of the fact that previous requests for her hand in marriage had been denied by Abondio, Emilia’s father, on the grounds that Camillo was not sufficiently wealthy.

Not to miss this opportunity to benefit financially from the foolishness of his employers, Iachelino promises to help them all by applying his magical arts to their problems. While he assists them, he openly derides and debases the men who have hired him. In a dialogue with the servant Nibbio, the necromancer voices his opinion of his employers, as if he were a knowledgeable live-stock-breeder examining his various animals. Grouping his animals into three different categories according to the type of profit they produce for him, he does not hesitate to place his employers Massimo, Cintio, and Camillo, into these groups:

ASTR. ... Sono alcuni animali, de i quali utile
tutto non puoi aver che di mangiarli,
come il porco; altri sono che, serbandoli,
ti danno ogni giorno di frutto; e quando all’ultimo
non ne dan più, tu te li ceni o desini,
come la vacca, il bue, come la pecora;
sono alcuni altri, che vivi ti rendono
spessi guadagni, e morti nulla vagliono,
come il cavallo, come il cane e l’asino.
Similmente ne gli uomini si trovano gran differenze. Alcuni, che per transito, in nave o in ostaria, tra i piè ti vengono, che mai più a riveder non hai, tuo debito è di spogliarli e di rubarli subito. Son altri, come tavernieri, artefici, che qualche carlin sempre e qualche iulio hanno in borsa, ma mai non hanno in copia; tòr spesso e poco al tratto a questi, è un ottimo consiglio, perché se così li scortico a fatto, poco è il mio guadagno, e perdomi quel che quasi ogni giorno può cavarsene. Altri ne le cittadi sono ricchissimi di case, possessioni, e di gran traffichi: questi devemo differire a mordere, non che a mangiar, fin che da lor si succiano or tre fiorini, or quattro, or dieci, or dodici; ma quando vuoi mutar paese all’ultimo, o che ti viene occasïone insolita, tosali alora fin sul vivo o scortica. In questa terza schiera è Cintio e Massimo, e Camillo, che con promesse e frottole in lungo meno, e menarò, fin che aridi non li truovi del latte: un dì poi, toltomi l’agio ch’esser mi paian grassi e morbidi, io trarrò lor la pelle, e mangeromeli. (II.2)

According to the necromancer’s selection system, the first category holds those animals that are useful only for eating such as pigs; the second category gathers those animals that provide some daily substance, such as cows and sheep who produce milk every day and once they cease producing can be slaughtered and eaten; the third category gathers those animals that bring great profits while they are still alive, but nothing when they are dead, such as horses, dogs, or donkeys. The necromancer places his employers, that is, Massimo, Cintio, and Camillo, in this third category because they are wealthy and possess houses and great merchandise; and he intends to defraud them mercilessly while it is still possible because once they are “dead” they will be of no use to him. By comparing the higher sector of society with animals such as horses, dogs, and donkeys the necromancer suspends the standard hierarchy of Renaissance society, turns it on its head and debases it, thus mocking the wealthy classes, again while carnival season permits it.
There are other prominent examples showing the necromancer’s ability to debase his employers, Cintio and Camillo. He tells Camillo to take off his doublets and sit in a box so that he may be transferred invisibly to Emilia’s bedroom where, supposedly, a night tryst with Emilia is to take place. Because Camillo’s rational thinking is obscured by his passionate love for Emilia, he submissively follows the necromancer’s plan. Thus, while allowing the necromancer to arrange the night encounter with Emilia, Camillo loses his dignity and lets others publicly deride and degrade him. He lets the necromancer strip him of his doublet, put him in the box and have him transported in the box to Emilia’s house. Because of unforeseen circumstances, at the end of the play the box with Camillo in it will be brought to the wrong location and Camillo will be forced to run down the street in his underwear, thus further degrading himself, this time in public. Similarly, Cintio also permits himself to be debased by the necromancer when he allows the necromancer to bring the box with Camillo in it to his wife’s bedroom in the hope that her alleged adultery would be discovered and subsequently lead to the dissolution of his marriage with her. However, he ignores the fact that, while his wife would be considered an adulteress, he would be called a cuckold. According to Diane Ghirardo, “a husband who allowed himself to be cuckolded suffered the embarrassment of being forced to tour the city’s taverns and inns to the sound of tambourines with a pair of horns on his head, to be belittled by his compatriots as a cuckold.”158

The necromancer’s penchant for degrading the upper levels of Ferrarese society must have been reinforced by the fact that in reality he was a member of a marginalised sector of the city. From the fifteenth through the sixteenth centuries, the dukes of Ferrara demonstrated consistent tolerance toward Jews. When Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, Duke Ercole I welcomed several families of Spanish Jews to Ferrara to join the city’s already flourishing Jewish population. In 1537, Ercole II (r. 1534-1559), grandson of Ercole I, also invited Jews expelled from Portugal and Spain to live in Ferrara. Although the Este family welcomed them and supported their settlement in the city, mainly because the Este could then reap the benefits of loans from Jewish bankers, the Jews, nonetheless, enjoyed limited rights and were consistently marginalised. They were allowed to settle in the city, but only in areas inhabited by Ferrara’s prostitutes, another marginalised group. Furthermore, Ferrarese laws required Jews to wear a

particular badge to identify them visually to passers-by and prohibited Jews and Christians from engaging in carnal relationships. There were also occasional uprisings against Jewish settlers in Ferrara showing that, no matter how tolerant the duke’s administration might be, the duke’s people still viewed Jews as outsiders.\textsuperscript{159} In light of the marginalised status of Jews in Ferrara, the actions of the necromancer—who was an expelled Iberian Jew pretending to be a necromancer, astrologer, physician, and conjurer of spirits—must have incited carnival laughter with an ambivalent meaning that derides, mocks, celebrates, and renews the imposed norms of Ferrarese society.

The final element of subversion to be discussed in relation to Ariosto’s comedies is to be found in the relationship between the second marginalised group, sex-trade workers, and the wealthy sectors of Ferrarese society. In Ariosto’s last play \textit{La Lena}—considered by the majority of critics\textsuperscript{160} to be his most complete, refined, and most free from classical imitation—the title character Lena embodies this group. In fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Ferrara, there was a distinct contrast between the rights of women and men. Based on the strict social and political hierarchy that existed at that time, it was the men who established and enforced policies and statutes, while women were expected merely to comply with them. For instance, according to formal policies, unwed women and widows who were not supported financially by their families were expected to be enclosed in convents. Similarly, informal policies and social mores prohibited respectable women, and specifically young and unmarried women, from appearing in public without a chaperon. A family’s honour and dishonour were in the hands of its young unmarried female members, who were expected to be chaste; and if they did not marry then they were required to retire to a convent where their chastity was safeguarded.\textsuperscript{161}

In reality, however, not all women followed these strict policies and social mores. There were some who chose a different path conditioned by their social and economic status. Driven by

\textsuperscript{159} Chirardo, “Marginal Spaces of Prostitution in Renaissance Ferrara,” 87-129.
\textsuperscript{161} Ghirardo, “Marginal Spaces of Prostitution in Renaissance Ferrara,” 88-89.
poverty, widowhood, rape, and/or “deflowering,” some women became full-time prostitutes. This “solution” to poverty and post-traumatic stress caused by widowhood and rape was so extensive that by the end of the fifteenth century there were about twenty-three brothels in Ferrara. Prostitution itself was not illegal, but women who practised this profession had very limited rights under ducal regulations and Ferrara’s statutes. For example, they were obliged to live under strict governmental control; they resided in a chiuso, a single-room or small residence, belonging to the brothel, and were prohibited from frequenting other inns or hostels in the city; they could not rent a room elsewhere because Ferrara’s laws strongly forbade private citizens from renting rooms or apartments to prostitutes; if a prostitute had to appear in public or walk along the streets, Ferrarese statutes obliged her to wear a yellow mantle so as to distinguish herself from honourable women. Furthermore, if a prostitute ignored these regulations, she risked punishments that could range from a fine to public whipping or torture, from being paraded partially nude through the streets to having people verbally and physically abuse her.

In spite of the behavioural restrictions and marginalised status of prostitutes, some married women in financial difficulties did rely on prostitution to supplement their family income. This ‘solution’ to improve the family income was a perilous activity because women ran the risk of being publicly denounced as prostitutes by their neighbours or by their husbands and consequently punished or forced to enter a public brothel.

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162 It is a term that describes a young woman who lost her virginity under a promise of marriage and who eventually found herself abandoned.

163 The thirteenth-century Ferrarese statutes prohibited prostitutes from living in the city—between the Po River and the central Via Sabbioni, from Porta Agnese to Porta Leone, close to the Church of San Francesco, and in Via San Paolo—and frequent two settlements located outside the northern walls of Ferrara, Borgo San Leonardo and Borgo San Guglielmo. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, these statutes were no longer applied and subsequently the public brothels (postriboli) were established inside Ferrara’s city walls. In addition to the establishment of the public brothels, the system of taxation on the consummation of prostitutes in the taverns was introduced and enacted. For a comprehensive discussion of the sex-trade in Ferrara, see Ghirardo’s “The Topography of Prostitution in Renaissance Ferrara,” 402–431.

164 For instance, in 1496 the wife of a Ferrarese police officer was punished with the scopa for having an illicit relationship with other men. She was forced to wear a headgear depicting devils and run the main city streets. And while she traversed the streets, she was pelted with rotten fruit and sticks. Catalano describes it as follows: “nel 1496 fu scopata la moglie di un capo di birri, rea di illeciti amori. La disgraziata fu costretta a percorrere a piedi le principali vie della città con una mitria in capo, ov’erano dipinti alcuni diavoli, e infine fu condotta dinanzi ai cortigiani, che copirono di pomi, di rape e di zucche marce la penitente, il boja e i fanti del capitano di giustizia ...”, Vita di Ludovico Ariosto, 106.

In addition to full-time and occasional prostitutes, there were also concubines. Usually a concubine was supported by a single man for an unspecified period of time that could last for a few months to years. Although concubines were engaged in illicit sexual relations, they were not confined to the city’s brothels and were therefore indistinguishable in public from honourable women. Because of the nature of the relationship on which they depended, concubines always ran the risk of becoming full-time prostitutes when that relationship ended.

Unlike prostitution, which was legal and tolerated, though strictly controlled, pimping (lenocinio) was completely illegal for Ferrarese citizens. Any Ferrarese man could be declared a pimp if he slept in the room of a prostitute more than twice a week; if he communicated and/or stayed at her place for at least an hour more than three times a week; or if he used her earnings to support himself. The punishment for pimping was severe. A Ferrarese pimp (lenone) could be publicly tortured, placed in prison, or forced to pay fines. Moreover, if he continued practising his occupation after a conviction, he ran the risk of having his nose, foot, or hand cut off. A foreign pimp, however, could freely practise his trade since he was not subject to such punishments.

Considering the marginalised status of these men and women whether they were pimps, professional or occasional prostitutes, or concubines, it is impossible to imagine that they could ever have dared to speak out against the city’s statutes and social norms. In La Lena, however, Ariosto made such a daring act possible by taking advantage of the carnivalesque element of subversion. In the play, the lead female character Lena is an occasional prostitute, concubine, and pimp. Through these multiple roles, she manages to control, manipulate, mock, and degrade the wealthy male sector of Ferrarese society. Lena, whose name is a diminutive of Maddalena, the famous repentant prostitute from the New Testament, is a marginalised person not by choice, but by circumstances. She is a married woman who is forced to supplement her family income because her husband Pacifico, whom she considers a good for nothing, is unable or unwilling to provide for the family. By becoming the mistress of wealthy Fazio and teaching his daughter

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166 Ghirardo, “Marginal Spaces of Prostitution in Renaissance Ferrara,” 87-97.
some women’s skills (sewing, embroidery) and some basic reading, Lena is able to live free of charge (so to speak) in a small house owned by Fazio. Since free rental accommodations are not sufficient to survive, Lena occasionally prostitutes herself in order to be able to buy food and other necessities of life. Although her husband Pacifico reproaches Lena for resorting to prostitution, he does nothing to release her from this burden. On the contrary, he even finds clients for her and advises her to use various techniques to please them:

LENA Anzi la tua [di Pacifico] insaziabile
golaccia, che ridotti ci ha in miseria;
che, se non fossi stata io che, per pascerti,
mi son di cento gaglioffi fatta asina,
saresti morto di fame. Or pel merito
del bene ch’io t’ho fatto, mi rimproveri,
poltron, ch’io sia puttana?
PACIF. Ti rimprovero
che lo dovresti far con più modestia.
LENA Ah, beccaccio, tu parli di modestia?
S’io avessi a tutti quelli, che propostomi
ogn’ora hai tu, voluto dar recapito,
io non so meretrice in mezzo al Gambaro
che fusse a questo di di me più publica.
Né questo uscio dinanzi per riceverli
tutti bastar pareati, e consigliavimi
che quel di dietro anco ponessi in opera. (V.11)

Realizing that she is living a miserable life, Lena tries to persuade Fazio to increase the small salary he pays her for teaching his daughter, but the miserly man refuses. At this point Lena decides to take her revenge on Fazio and supplement her income by capitalizing on (that is, prostituting) her young charge, Fazio’s daughter, Licinia. Lena justifies her decision on the grounds of her own advancing age and miserable future prospects:

LENA S’io avessi a star tuttavia giovane,
il mantenere amendue [sé stessa e Pacifico] col medesimo
modo usato fin qui mi saria agevole;
ma come le formiche si proveggono
pel verno, così è giusto che le povere
par mie per la vecchiezza si proveggano;
e che mentre v’hanno agio, un’arte imparino
che, quando fia il bisogno, poi non abbiano
ad imparar, ma vi sien dotte e pratiche.
E che arte poss’io far, che più proficua
ci sia di questa, e che mi sia più facile
ad imparar? Che vuoi ch’io indugi all’ultimo,
quand’io sarò nel bisogno, ad apprenderla? (V.11)

Lena thus agrees to arrange a night tryst for the wealthy young man Flavio with her young charge Licinia at her house, but on condition that he pay her twenty-five florins for the service. In arranging such an encounter, Lena is dishonouring Fazio’s family by allowing Licinia to be deflowered by Flavio and, at the same time, degrading Flavio, who is thus obliged to pay in cash for private time with the woman he loves. Flavio is further degraded when, having arrived for the night tryst without money, he is forced by Lena to pawn his own clothes for the twenty-five florins he needs to pay for access to Licinia.

LENA Tu pur te ne spoglia, e mandala
ad impegnar tu stesso.
FLAV. Mi delibero
di compiacerti, e di farti conoscere
che gabbar non ti voglio. Piglia, Corbolo,
questa berretta e questa roba: aiutami,
che la non vada in terra.
CORB. Vuoi tu trartela?
FLAV. La vo’ ogni modo satisfar; che diavolo fia?
CORB. Or vadan tutti li beccai e impicchinsi,
che nessun ben come la Lena scortica. (I.2)

Driven not by reason but by carnal desire, Flavio undergoes further degradation when he quickly removes his cap and cloak and remains in his undergarments until the end of the play. To complete the process of degradation, Lena’s husband, Pacifico, convinces Flavio to hide inside a large wine barrel so that Fazio and prospective home-buyers do not discover his presence in the house.

In this play, a rich young man, driven by a desire to satisfy his carnal appetite, allows himself to be mocked and degraded by a member of society whose social rank and financial status are distinctly lower than his own. This self-conscious debasement for the sake of carnal satisfaction facilitates the creation of the carnivalesque subversion in this and other plays by Ariosto. Considering that during carnival people followed a hedonistic ideology and enjoyed
freedom and equality, it is reasonable to believe that Ariosto had representatives of marginalised groups in Ferrara lord over the wealthy sector of society in order to excite carnivalesque laughter that derides and mocks established norms and customs while, at the same time, renewing and celebrating them.

*e) Restoration of Order in Ariosto’s Plays*

The carnival season allowed people to celebrate and enjoy temporarily freedom from imposed norms and customs. After carnival, this liberal and subversive ideology was abandoned in favour of the established order. The restoration of order is thus an important carnival element in Ariosto’s plays. In the final acts of all his comedies, except for the incomplete play *I Studenti*, the end of carnivalesque freedom coincides with the return to established norms and customs. In *La Cassaria*, after all complications instigated by the carnal desire of wealthy young men are resolved, Erofilo apologizes to his father for being a disobedient son and frees his servant Volpino, while the pimp Lucrano receives payment for his sex-workers. At the end of the play, the young masters and their servants will meet at the Moor’s Inn, a well-known tavern in Ferrara, to celebrate the end of carnival and, implicitly, the end of carnivalesque subversion.

In *I Suppositi*, the disclosure of the carnivalesque exchange of identities between Erostrato and his servant Dulippo leads to unexpected results: the servant acknowledges his abuse of trust and regrets losing his temper with his old master; Filogono forgives his disobedient son and proposes to Damone that he wed his daughter Polinesta to Erostrato; and Cleandro finally finds his lost son. The carnivalesque pretence in this play thus ends with a happy ending and the return to order is celebrated and reaffirmed with the wedding of Erostrato and Polinesta.

In *Il Negromante*, the carnivalesque freedom of the marginalised sector ends in a happy resolution for the wealthy echelons of society. Although the necromancer’s main goal of defrauding Massimo, Cintio, and Camillo is unsuccessful, he nonetheless does inadvertently fulfill Cintio’s and Camillo’s wishes. While inside the box in Lavinia’s bedroom, Camillo learns that Cintio is in love with Lavinia and has been secretly married to her. He then discloses Cintio’s pretence to Massimo and Damone and proposes to marry Emilia himself. At this point Massimo and Damone agree to dissolve the unconsummated marriage between Emilia and
Cintio and Damone accepts Cintio’s marriage proposal. Massimo, on the other hand, recognizes that Lavinia is his lost daughter and is very happy that Cintio and Lavinia are already married. This play, too, has a happy ending that coincides with a wedding celebration. However, unlike plays where in the final act no one is chastised for one’s actions, this play ends with a transgressor punished. While in the first version (1520) the necromancer escapes punishment by fleeing Ferrara, in the second version (1528), instead, he is defrauded, paradoxically, by the servant Temolo who tricks Iachelino into giving him his garments and promises to bring the silver basins from Damone, but never returns. Moreover, the necromancer is also betrayed by his own servant Nibbio who, just like Temolo, promises to bring the stolen goods to the necromancer, but does not do so. In the end, having twice suffered at the hands of servants, the necromancer is forced to flee Ferrara, but this time he is not unscathed. The punishment he receives marks the end of carnivalesque freedom and the return to normal rules and customs.

Finally, in *La Lena* the carnivalesque subversion shown through the relationship between the marginalised and wealthy sectors of society ends with a happy ending for the wealthy sector. Although Lena tries to take her revenge on Fazio, all her plans fail once Flavio is delivered in the wine barrel to Fazio’s house. There he freely satisfies his carnal desire with Licinia and in the end marries her. As the final curtain falls, Lena’s miserable situation has not changed—she continues to be Fazio’s concubine and occasionally prostitutes herself in order to provide for her family, while wealthy Fazio still continues to enjoy Lena’s sexual services and his power over her. In this case, too, once carnival is over the situation returns to normal.

*f) Functions of Carnival in Ariosto’s Plays*

The examination of the carnivalesque subversion present in Ariosto’s plays in the exchange of roles between the servants and their masters and between the marginalised poor and the dominant wealthy sectors of Ferrarese society carried out using Bakhtin’s theory of carnival has clearly demonstrated that, when seen through the prism of carnival spirit, these works distinctly convey Ariosto’s aim not only to entertain, but also to critique his society in order to expose inherent problems and, hopefully, begin the process of resolving them. The exposition of Ariosto’s critical view of his society in the plays is not unique. Ariosto acutely illustrates it in his *Satires* composed from 1517 to 1525 in which, while sharing his personal frustration caused by
dealing with certain members of his society, he unveils his critical judgement of them. For instance, in his third *Satire* addressed to his cousin Annibale Malaguzzi, Ariosto accuses Pope Leo X of practising nepotism:

Cugin, con questo esempio vuo’ che spacci Quei che credon che ’l Papa porre inanti Mi debba a Neri, a Vanni, a Lotti e a Bacci. Li nepoti e i parenti, che son tanti, Prima hanno a ber; poi quei che lo aiutaro A vestirsi il più bel de tutti i manti. Bevuto ch’abbian questi, gli fia caro Che beano quei che contra il Soderino Per tornarlo in Firenze si levaro. L’un dice: - Io fui con Pietro in Casentino, E d’esser preso e morto a risco venni. - Io gli prestai danar -, grida Brandino. Dice un altro: - A mie spese il frate tenni Uno anno, e lo rimessi in veste e in arme, Di cavallo e d’argento gli sovenni. – Se, fin che tutti beano, aspetto a trarme La volontà di bere, o me di sete, O secco li pozzo d’acqua veder parme.169

Although Ariosto’s criticism directed at Pope Leo X in the third satire and at his followers as well in his other satires is evidently incisive, it could not be made public since the *Satires* were meant for private reading by his close friends and relatives. The *Satires*, in fact, were first published only posthumously in 1534. In his plays, instead, Ariosto courageously took the opportunity to expose some of the problems present in Ferrarese society by capitalizing on the carnivalesque reversal of hierarchical orders and blurring of boundaries that allow people to vent their frustrations and express their opinions on the various faults present in the representatives of both the higher and lower ranks of society. While bringing to the stage the licence that characterises the carnival season—and thus illustrating the upside down world—Ariosto explicitly mocks, debases, and criticises various representatives of Ferrarese society, in particular

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169 Ariosto, *Satire*, 66. Ariosto composed this satire in reply to his cousin’s letter in which Malaguzzi inquired about Ariosto’s state of affairs while suggesting Ariosto seek his fortune at the court of his old friend Pope Leo X. For a comprehensive study of Ariosto’s *Satires* see Wiggins’ critical edition of Ariosto’s *Satires* in *The Satires of Ludovico Ariosto: A Renaissance Autobiography*. 
the wealthy (both old and young), priests, lawyers, and even ducal officials. It should be noted that in sixteenth-century Ferrara any criticism directed at the urban middle class and the ducal officials could have been interpreted as criticism against the duke himself, something very risky especially for someone like Ariosto, who held a position at court.

In each of his five plays, Ariosto portrays wealthy young people as irresponsible, immoral, selfish, and lustful human beings. Paradoxically these young men portray characteristics similar to those of Orlando in the epic poem *Orlando furioso* that Ariosto so vividly derides, mocks, and ridicules through the carnivalesque subversion displayed in the relationship between the young Christian man and the young Infidel woman, to name but one. While in France the Infidels threaten to destroy Christendom, Orlando, the lord of Anglant and nephew of the Holy Emperor, driven by his carnal love for Angelica, princess of Cathay, sets aside Christendom and its needs in order to go in search of Angelica and thus to satisfy his carnal desire with her (VIII. 81-89). In his search, Orlando who is described by Ariosto as “di valor non avea pari al mondo, / in tal sembiante, in sì superba fronte, / che ’l dio de l’arme a lui parea secondo,” (XII. 74), loses his wits when he realizes that his search is in vain because Angelica has wed a young man of humble origin and is now on her way to Cathay. Having let carnal desire overshadow and control his rational thinking, Orlando loses his much esteemed valour and dignity and transforms himself into a furious beast.

Aflitto e stanco al fin cade ne l’erba,
e ficca gli occhi al cielo, e non fa motto.
Senza cibo e dormir così si serba,
che ’l sole esce tre volte e torna sotto.
Di crescere non cessò la pena acerba,
che fuor del senno al fin l’ebbe condotto.
Il quarto di, da gran furor commosso,
e maglie e piastre si stracciò di dosso.

Qui riman l’elmo, e là riman lo scudo,
lontan gli arnesi, e più lontan l’usbergo:
’l arme su tutte, in somma vi concludo,

170 This poem shows a wealth of elements of carnivalesque subversion and grotesque realism that display various facets of Ariosto’s social criticism, but the analysis of such elements is beyond the scope of the present work.

171 Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, 262.
avean pel bosco differente albergo.
E poi si squarciò i panni, e mostrò ignudo
l’ispido ventre e tutto ’l petto e ’l tergo;
e cominciò la gran follia, si orrenda,
che de la più non sarà mai ch’intenda.

In tanta rabbia, in tanto furor venne,
che rimase offuscato in ogni senso.
Di tor la spada in man non gli sovenne;
che fatte avria mirabil cose, penso.
Ma né quella, né scure, né bipenne
era bisogno al suo vigore immenso.
Quivi fe’ ben de le sue prove eccelse,
ch’un alto pino al primo crollo svelse:

e svelse dopo il primo altri parecchi,
come fosser finocchi, ebuli o aneti;
e fe’ il simil di querce e d’olmi vecchi,
di faggi e d’orni e d’illici e d’abeti.
Quel ch’un ucellator che s’apparecchi
il campo mondo, fa, per por le reti,
dei giunchi e de le stoppie e de l’urtiche,
facea de cerri e d’altre piante antiche. (XXIII. 132-135)

This carnivalesque subversion of moral and spiritual valour displayed in the relationship between
the Christian man and the Infidel woman clearly reveals Ariosto’s intention to expose the moral
corruption that existed in the society of his time. It also shows that Ariosto seized the opportunity
to voice his social critique not only in his plays, but also in his epic poem. In the plays, young
people act irrationally, disregarding the fact that their inappropriate and reckless behaviour may
damage their families’s reputations. The young men in the plays are ready to squander their
fathers’s fortune and their own inheritance for the sake of satisfying their immediate carnal
desires. In La Cassaria, Erofilo clearly states that he is ready even to steal his father’s
merchandise and savings:

EROF. ... Quando non possa venire secretamente al mio disegno, ci verrò alla scoperta;
né chiavi né chiovi mi potrà serrare cosa ch’io sappia che sia per il mio bisogno.
Sarei bene a peggior termini che Tantalo, se in mezo l’acqua mi lassassi strugger
di sete. Ho in casa panni, sete, lane, drappi d’oro e d’argento, vini e grani da fare
in una ora quanti danari io voglio; e serò si pusillanime e vile, che non vorrò
satisfare per un tratto al desiderio mio? (I.5)
To support Erofilo’s plan, his friend Caridoro replies that he would have done the same had his father been away from home:

**CARID.** Deh fussi pur io nel tuo grado, che avessi mio padre absente, che non andrei, per Dio, cercando altro mezo che me stesso per satisfarmi! Dui giorni soli che se levassi da Metelino, mi basterieno per cento: netterei si bene il granaro, e si sgomberrei di ogni masseria camere e sale, che parrebbe che uno anno vi avesseno avuto li Spagnuoli alloggiamento. (I.5)

In *I Suppositi*, a well-to-do Sicilian merchant supports his son, Erostrato, financially by paying for his university education and his lodgings in Ferrara, fully expecting the youth to study for a career in the family’s business, but the irresponsible son works instead as a servant in someone else’s house in order to have access to his beloved and enjoy nightly trysts with her. To conceal the ruse, the young man exchanges clothes, name, and status with his servant, who in turn attends university and thus helps to keep the fiction of “Erostrato” studying.

In *Il Negromante*, Cintio, the adopted son of a very wealthy merchant, betrays his adoptive father’s trust by secretly marrying Lavinia, a young woman of humble origin, and by concealing his marital status from him. Unaware of Cintio’s clandestine marital status, the father arranges Cintio’s marriage with another young and wealthy woman, Emilia. Lacking not only in honesty, but also in courage, Cintio does not have the nerve to inform his father about his marriage with Lavinia and so ends up committing bigamy and humiliating Emilia’s dignity. Just like Erofilo and Erostrato, Cintio pretends to be an obedient and respectful son because he expects to receive an inheritance from his father, but in fact he is a manipulating and untrustworthy son.

In *I Studenti*, Eurialo, the son of a wealthy merchant, also deceives his father when he invites his sweetheart, the servant girl Ippolita, and another maid to stay at his father’s house and then tells his father that they are the daughter and wife of Master Lazaro. Finally, in *La Lena*, Flavio lets his servant Corbolo persuade his father, also a very well-to-do merchant, to pay for his carnal pleasures. Considering that the presence of a well-to-do young man characterized by immoral behaviour and extravagant demands is a feature of each play, it becomes obvious that by portraying this character type in the play, Ariosto wants his audience to be aware of the social
problem with dishonest youths driven by their sexual desires, and perhaps to take measures to educate young men to be more honest, responsible, and reasonable.

Ariosto criticises not only well-to-do young males, but also privileged young females. In each of Ariosto’s play, an upper-class young woman is, just like her male counterpart, driven by lustful desires. Not surprisingly, then, each of these young women demonstrates immoral behaviour and filial disobedience similar to those of their male counterparts. For instance, in La Cassaria Eulalia and Corisca, two young ladies from good families, have unfortunately fallen into the hands of the procurer Lucrano. Instead of trying to free themselves from him, remain chaste and return home, they let their sexual desires take over and willingly become the concubines of their two male beloveds, Erofilo and Caridoro. In I Suppositi, Polinesta, the daughter of the wealthy merchant Damone, dishonours her family by allowing herself to be ‘deflowered’ and by having, for several years, a nightly tryst with her lover, Erostrato.

In I Studenti, Flamminia, a lawyer’s daughter, has a secret affair with Claudio, fully ignoring parental disapproval. In La Lena, Licia, the young daughter of the well-to-do merchant Fazio, allows Lena to arrange a night tryst for her with her admirer Flavio that eventually will dishonour her and her family. It is striking that none of the young females represented by Ariosto exhibits the virtues of chastity that was expected of young women at that time, nor the integrity that would allow them to think of their own and their family’s honour. On the contrary, they all are depicted as lustful, immoral, and disobedient daughters, hardly an example to contemporary female viewers.

Ariosto’s criticism is also directed at the older generation consisting of churchmen, lawmen, and ducal officials—representatives of the established order. In each of his plays, Ariosto does not miss the opportunity to deride at least one or more representatives of the established order for abusing their professional power. In his incomplete play I Studenti, Ariosto’s critique is directed at both churchmen and lawmen. In this play, a wealthy merchant Bartolo confides a secret to a Friar. He says that about twenty years earlier his dying friend Gentile had made him the sole beneficiary of his entire estate on condition that Bartolo provide Gentile’s mistress with a valuable dowry, find a suitable man to marry her, and take care of Gentile’s illegitimate daughter as if she were his own. After Gentile’s death, Bartolo had received Gentile’s entire estate without any difficulty and had thus become very rich. However,
Bartolo had not kept his promise because he could not find either Gentile’s mistress or their daughter, since right after Gentile’s death his mistress had married a Neapolitan man and had moved with her daughter to Naples. After all these years, Bartolo still feels guilty for not having found the two women and for not having undertaken a more thorough search. Bartolo thus confesses to the Friar that he has always had the intention of finding them, but never had the time to go to Naples. After having listened to Bartolo’s confession, the Friar offers to release him from the promise if he were to carry out some charitable act in its lieu:

Frate Ben si potrà commutar in qualch’opera pia. Non si trova al mondo si fort’obligo, che non si possa scior con l’elemosina (III.6).\(^\text{172}\)

Seeing that the Friar’s suggestion that he make a generous donation to the Church might absolve him of the unfulfilled promise made to his dying friend, Bartolo accepts, but in return wants to have a written record of it. To reassure Bartolo, the Friar promises to prepare a plenary bull confirming the full absolution of sin and reassures him that he has the same authority to absolve sins as does the pope himself.

Frate Portaròlavi, e ve la lasciarò veder e leggere. Siate pur certo che la bolla è amplissima, e che di tutt’i casi, componendovi meco, vi posso interamente assolvere non meno che potria ’l papa medesimo.

Bartolo Vi credo; nondimeno, per discarico de la mia conscienzia, la desidero veder, e far anco vedere e leggere al mio parrocchiano.

Frate \textit{Sit in nomine Domini.} Portaròlavi, mostratela a chi vi pare. In tanto messer Domene-dio sia con voi.

Bartolo E con voi, padre, simile-mente. (IV.4)\(^\text{173}\)

\(^{172}\) Ariosto, \textit{Opere minori}, 633.

Although a corrupt friar is present only in the incomplete play I Studenti, he explicitly demonstrates Ariosto’s views on members of ecclesiastical orders. Ariosto derides friars who abuse the power bestowed upon them by the Church in order to gain great profit for themselves at the expense of weak-spirited and weak-willed people.

A second example of Ariosto’s critique of the corruption among the representatives of the established order present in I Studenti touches on the figure of Master Lazaro. A professor of law at the university of Pavia, Master Lazaro enjoys the reputation of being a very knowledgeable professor. However, his actions against Claudio, who is madly in love with his daughter Flamminia, prove the opposite. While Claudio studied at the university, he rented a room in Master Lazaro’s house, where he met Flamminia and fell in love with her. When Flamminia’s parents learned about their daughter’s affair with Claudio, they threw him out of their house. Nonetheless, Claudio kept courting Flamminia by appearing on her street, lingering at the corner near her house, and gesturing in a way that could reflect badly on her family honour. As a result, Master Lazaro decided to come up with a stratagem that would force Claudio to leave the city. One night, when a friend of Master Lazaro was murdered, Master Lazaro accused Claudio of the murder and immediately started legal proceedings against him. Feeling powerless against the corruption of local court officials, Claudio immediately fled town.

This example shows that while Ariosto depicts a youth who has desperately fallen in love, he does not miss the opportunity to deride corrupt law professors for abusing their professional power. Ariosto characterizes Master Lazaro as a very knowledgeable law professor, which would imply that Master Lazaro lives his life in accordance with the law he knows so well; in reality, however, Master Lazaro consciously neglects the law and, for the sake of saving the honour of his daughter and his family, falsely and wilfully accuses an innocent man of murder. Ariosto therefore warns his audience against people who enjoy a high reputation (in this case, law professors), pointing out that even they are subject to human foibles and weaknesses.

Ariosto’s negative opinion of corrupt churchmen and lawyers closely aligned with the ducal government was more than just his personal view. Ariosto had, in fact, gained first-hand knowledge of the situation when he served as a provincial commissioner in the mountainous regions of the Garfagnana located in what is now north-western Tuscany, but at that time constituted the south-western part of the Duchy of Modena, also governed by the Este family.
Duke Alfonso I d'Este (r. 1505-1534) commissioned Ariosto to govern the entire Garfagnana, which consisted of four administrative districts: Castelnuovo, Camporgiano, Trassilico, and Terre Nuove. Each district had an elected council of eight officials, renewed every six months, that was responsible for carrying out local policy under the supervision of the commissioner. There were also other officials, selected and appointed by the ducal administration, who helped to guard the surrounding region. These officials, including captains, the duke’s representatives, and guards, had to fight against rampant crime and corruption as well as constant threats of raids by bandits who managed to manipulate and conspire with corrupt local officials. In spite of the established institution of government in the Garfagnana, Ariosto often had difficulties governing the region because there were also two rival groups headed by powerful local families that divided themselves into Guelphs, who supported the efforts of Florentine and papal factions, and Ghibellines, who favoured the policy and ideology of the Este family and its French allies. The powerful families that allied themselves with the Guelphs collaborated with bandits to fight against the Ghibellines and this made Ariosto’s efforts to govern the region even more difficult.174

Although his service in that region lasted only three years (from February 1522- to early summer 1525), it seems that it was enough to show him, first-hand, the corruption flourishing in every corner of that province and to make him understand that it was impossible for one man alone to eradicate it. He regularly wrote letters to the duke and his officials about the crimes and corruption in the region in the hope that they would give him the necessary support and assistance to fight it. The 156 extant letters emanating from his service in the Garfagnana are mainly bureaucratic missives, but they provide a valuable insight into Ariosto’s views on the political, social, and religious crises of his time. One letter that stands out among the others is addressed to Duke Alfonso and is dated 30 January 1524. In it, Ariosto touches on the crime and corruption of local officials and bluntly expresses his objective reasoning and disappointment with the duke’s tolerance and support of unworthy local officials and criminal elements:

Illmo et exmo Domino D. meo singmo Domino Duci Ferrariae etc. Ferrariae.

———

174 Looney, ‘My Muse Will Have a Story to Paint’ Selected Prose of Ludovico Ariosto, 56.
Illìmo et exìmo Sìmo. Se vostra exìta non mi aiuta a difendere l’onor de l’officio, io per me non ho la forza di farlo; ché se bene io condanno e minaccio quelli che mi disubidiscano, e poi vostra exìta li absolve, o determini in modo che mostrì di dar più lor ragion che a me, essa viene a dar aiuto a deprimere l’autorità del magistro. Serà meglio che, s’io non ci sono idoneo, a mandare uno che fosse più al proposito, che guastando tuttavìa quello che bene o male io faccia si attenuasse la maestà del commissariato, si come è accaduto ne la rivocatione de la lettera già registrata, come ne l’absolutione di ser Tomaso e confirmatione c’habbia a proseguire l’officio fin al suo termine, et altre cose che non voglio hora replicare. Se tale ignominìa si facesse a me solo, non ne farei parola, perché vostra exìta mi può trattare come suo servo; ma redundando tali incarichi più ne l’onor de l’officio e subsequentemente a far le persone con chi ho da praticare più insolenti verso li lor governi, non mi par di tolerarlo senza dolermìne a vostra S. Di nuovo v. exìta può havere inteso, perché n’ho scritto a m. Bonìa (se quella lettera sarà perhò giunta prima di questa), come quelli da le Verugole hanno prigione quel Genese cha amazzò il conte Giovanni da San Donino; et io mandai sùbito sùbito un messo e poi li balestrieri per farlo condurre qui. Essi ricusaro di darmilo, dicendo che n’havero aviso m. Bonìa, e finché non havessino la risposta non erano per farne altro. Parendomi che non ci fossì l’honore de l’officio, riplicai con lettere che essi lo conduessino qui, e mettessino per loro chi volessino che intervenisseno alli examini, ch’io non ero per farne se non quanto volea la giustizia. Non mi hanno rescrìitto altro, se non che m’hanno mandato a dire a bocca pel messo che non me lo vogliono dare, et hanno di più usato parole, prima alli balestrieri e poi al secondo messo, che sanno che io havevo preso denari da li Madaleni, e per questo io non havevo fatto bruciare le lor case, e che dubitanò che s’havrò questo Genese in mano io lo lasci per danari. Se appresso all’insolentìe che per tutto il paese fanno questi di Simon prete, come vostra exìta ne debbe saper qualche cosa (ché già non è mancato per me di darne aviso), et al tenere di continuo banditi ne le ròcche appresso a Bernardello, anchora vostra exìta vol comportare che non rendano ubidientia al commissario, prego quella che mandi qui uno in mio luogo che habbia miglior stomaco di me a patire queste ingiurìe, ché a me non basta la patientia a tolerarle. Io non so quello che vostra exìta determi circa a Bernardello, che non havendo pace da alcuno di suoi nimici, de infiniti che n’ha, debbia stare nel paese dovunque voglia, e col favore di questi da le Verugole havere sempre sèguito di compagnia armata, e ne’suoi bisogni haver ricorso ne la miglior fortezza che in queste parti habbia vostra exìta, e tuttavìa sèguiti di mettere taglie, come altre volte n’ho scritto et ancho mandato a dire a bocca pel capitano de la Ragione. Ma se nè a questo, nè alli assassinamenti che fa Battistino Magnano e Donatello et altri ribaldi che hanno preso il campanile de Carreggini e vi sono stati parecchi giorni dentro come in una lor fortezza, non pare a vostra exìta di provedere, io non me ne debbìo pigliar più cura che essa voglia. Ma dove importa tanto smaccamento de l’honor mio, io vo’ gridare e farne instantia, e pregare e suplicare vostra exìta che più presto mi chiami a Ferrara, che lasciarmi qui con vergognìo: in buona gratia de la quale me raccomando.

Castelì, 30 Ianuarij 1524.
This letter reveals that Ariosto’s efforts to eradicate corruption and punish criminals were all in vain because Duke Alfonso simply did not support him. Ariosto wanted to sentence and threaten those who had broken the law, but Alfonso decided to absolve and release the criminals. Ariosto’s authority was later diminished to such an extent that he felt powerless and unable to govern the region effectively.

Ariosto also felt unable to fight against corrupt members of ecclesiastical orders. On 17 April 1523, he wrote to Duke Alfonso recounting the criminal activity of a local priest whom he wished to punish, but could not do so because of the limits of secular law. In this letter Ariosto asked Duke Alfonso to intervene and help to punish a corrupt member of the Church:

\[\text{Il\textsuperscript{mo} et ex\textsuperscript{mo} Domino domino meo sin\textsuperscript{gu}>l\textsuperscript{mo} Domino Duci Ferrariae. Ferrariae.}\]

\[\text{Il\textsuperscript{mo} et ex\textsuperscript{mo} Signor mio. Essendo io a questi giorni a Ferrara, accadé che due figliuoli di ser Evangelista dal Silico entraron qui a Castel\textsuperscript{o} una notte travestiti in casa d’una giovane, la quale, anch’ha\textsuperscript{ha} nome di far piacere segretamente ad un homo da bene di questa terra, pur non è puttana d’ognuno, e sta e pratica senza essere schivata con le donne da bene; e gli messero le mani adosso per tirarla per forza di casa: ella gridò e fu aiutata. La matina si venne a dolere al capitan. Per questo un figliuolo di ser Evangelista, deto prete Iob, il quale è chierico ordinato \textit{in sacris}, trovò la madre de detta giovane, e gli ruppe la testa e lasciò per morta: et è stata molti di in pericolo di morire. Per questo il capitan gli processe contra e lo condennò in 200 lire. Ser Evangelista produsse le bolle de li ordini del figliolo, e fece venire una inhibitoria dal Vescovo di Lucca: per questi, et ancho per altri rispetti, il capitan cessò dal procedere, in modo che \textquoteleft l detto prete Iob \textquoteleft è tornato a Castel\textsuperscript{o}. Questa cosa è di mal exempio, et a me spiace sommamente; e se non fosse che io temo le censure ecclesiastiche per haver beneficio, io non guarderei che costui fosse prete, e lo castigherei peggio che un laico; e quando io non potessi fare altro, almen li darei bando: ché se bene li S\textsuperscript{io} temporali non hanno potestà sopra li chierici, pur mi pare che né ancho li chierici debbiano poter star nel dominio de li detti Sig\textsuperscript{o} contra lor volontà. Io n’ho voluto scrivere a vostra ex\textsuperscript{lia}, acciò che quella gli faccia quella provisione che le pare, e d’ogni cosa che determini dia più presto al capitol\textsuperscript{o} la commissione che a me, perché esso non ha benefici come ho io. Et in buona gratia di vostra ex\textsuperscript{lia} \textit{humillime} mi raccomando.}\]

\[\text{Castel\textsuperscript{i}, 17 Aprilis 1523.}\]
Both these letters provide ample evidence of horrible crimes committed by corrupt lay and ecclesiastical officials in the Garfagnana and depict the world in which Ariosto lived and worked. When Ariosto’s service in the Garfagnana ended, he returned to Ferrara where he composed his last play, La Lena. Seeing that in this play Ariosto’s criticism of corrupt officials is more prominent than in his early plays, it may be deduced that his experience as a commissioner was more useful than he thought since it had a strong impact on his last dramatic composition. In this play in particular, Ariosto voices his frustrations with corruption practised by ducal footmen, officials, podestà, and court officials in the hope that it might one day be eradicated. As an example of corrupt ducal footmen, Ariosto depicts a scene where the servant Corbolo offers footmen to catch smugglers. Corbolo tells the footmen that Jewish moneylenders loaded a large quantity of cheese on two carts, covered it with straw, and will bring it along the streets in Ferrara without a customs certificate and without paying any duty on it. To catch them Corbolo has already asked his neighbour (Pacifico) for help—once the carts pass by, Pacifico would poke with his spear through the straw to find the hidden cheese—and when he would find the contraband, Corbolo would act as a peacemaker between Pacifico and Jewish smugglers so that they would come to an agreement that would prevent Pacifico from accusing the Jews of smuggling. Fearing that Pacifico will not cooperate, Corbolo invites the footmen to join him. Ignoring their official duties—to catch and declare smugglers to the customs office, to name but one—the footmen accept Corbolo’s offer and agree to split the gains.

STAFF. O Corbolo, buon di e buon anno. Come la fai? Vuonne tu dar bere?
CORB. Sì, volentieri, ma pensovi di dar meglio che bere.
STAFF. Che?
CORB. Fermandovi qui meco una mezz’ora, voglio mettervi un contrabando in man, da guadagnarvene al manco un paio di scudi per uno.
STAFF. Eccoci,
del ben, che ne farai, per averli obbligato.

CORB. Io vi dirò. Questi Giudei, che prestano
a Riva, ieri compraro una grandissima
quantità di formaggio, e caricatolo
han su dua carra, et in modo copertolo
sotto la paglia, che non potria accorgersi
alcun che cosa fosse, non sapendolo
com’io, che ’l so da quel da chi lo comprano:
e senza aver tolta bolletta, o dazio
pagato alcun, per queste vie il conducono.
Or non volendo io discoprirmi, avevone
parlato a questo mio vicino, e postogli
quel spiedo in mano, acciò che, come passino
le carra, frughì ne la paglia, e trovivi
il contrabando. Io saria qui a intromettermi
d’accordo, perché li Giudei non fossero
accusati da lui; ma pusillanimo
è costui sì, che non voglio impacciarmene
per suo mezzo. Or se a parte volete esserci
voi, volontier v’accettono.

STAFF. Anzi pregartene
vogliamo, et il guadagno promettemoti
partir da buon compagni. (V.1)

Although the Jewish smugglers do not appear and the plan is not carried out, Corbolo’s
stratagem and the footmen’s willingness to take part in it explicitly show that ducal officials are
corrupt.

Corbolo also informs the audience that while the duke protects his forests under harsh
penalties, his forestry officials still steal from him. Because of corrupt ducal officials, Corbolo is
able to purchase pheasants poached from the duke’s forests and bring them to Lena as part of
Flavio’s payment for his night tryst with his beloved Licinia.
et entro in Vescovato; et ecco giungere
l’amico co i fagian sotto, che pesano
quanto un par d’oche. Io metto mano, e quindici
bolognin su l’altar quivi gli annovero.
Mi soggiunge egli: – Se te ne bisognano
quattro, sei, sette, diece paia, accennami,
pur che tra noi stia la cosa. – Ringraziolo ...
(E gli prometto la mia fede d’essere
secreto; ma mi vien voglia di ridere:
che ’l Signor fa con tanta diligenzia
e con gride e con pene si terribili
guardar la sua campagna, e li medesimi
che n’hanno cura, son quei che la rubano.) (II.3)

The Ferrarese podestà also collaborates with criminals and divides the spoils with their leaders. Ariosto’s critique of the corrupt podestà is voiced in the dialogue between the well-to-do merchant Illario and his servant Corbolo. While Illario explains that his efforts to seek help from the podestà to punish the men who stole Flavio’s clothes would be unsuccessful, he reveals that the podestà is guilty of dishonest practices and lacking integrity:

ILAR. ... Or sia ancor ch’io vada al duca, e contigli
il caso; che farà, se non rimettermi
al podestade? E ’l podestade subito
n’avrà gli occhi alle mani; e non vedendoci
l’offerta, mostrerà che da far abbia
maggior faccende: e se non avrò indizii,
o testimoni, mi terrà una bestia.
Appresso, chi vuoi tu pensar che siano
li malfattori, se non li medesimi,
che per pigliar li malfattor si pagano?
Col cavallier de i quali o contestabile,
il podestà fa a parte; e tutti rubano. (III.2)

In addition to revealing the podestà’s dishonesty and his lack of integrity, Ariosto also informs his audience about corrupt practices of ducal court officials by bringing on stage the creditor Bartolo. To collect his money—forty lire and fifteen soldi—from Lena’s husband Pacifico, Bartolo filed a lawsuit against Pacifico. After a delay of four years, the judges finally decided that Pacifico must return the forty lire. While venting his frustration with the court decision,
Bartolo reveals that he spent a great deal of time and much more money just to cover the fees charged by lawyers, solicitors, and judges.

BART. ... Il credito
mio primo era quaranta lire e quindici soldi; e di questo tenuto in litigio
m’ha quattro anni, e ci son ben due sentenzie
date conformi; et ho speso in salarii
d’avocati, procuratori e giudici,
duo tanti; e poco men le citatorie,
le copie de scritture e de capitoli
mi costan. Metti appresso intolerabile
fatica, e gravi spese de gli essamini,
del levar de processi e de sentenzie;
le berrette, che a questo e a quel traendomi,
le scarpe, c’ho su pel palazzo logore
dietro a i procurator, che sempre corrono,
pìù di quaranta lire credo vagliano.
Poi dopo le fatiche e spese, i giudici
solo in quaranta lire lo condannano;
e chi ha speso si può grattar le natiche.
Ve’ le ragion che in Ferrara si rendono! (VI.2)

All these examples clearly expose the faults and corruption of ducal officials. It seems that they also provide substantial proof that in this final play Ariosto took advantage of the carnival freedom not only to deride and degrade human foibles, but also to inform the ruling duke about the anarchy and disobedience of his officials.

Ariosto comments upon corruption and crime in Ferrara in his early plays as well, but to a much lesser extent. In *La Cassaria*, he points out that the podestà lends more credence to, and bestows more favour on criminals than on law-abiding citizens, and that instead of helping honest citizens the podestà prefers to play cards or dice.

CRISOB. ... Se per parlare al Bassà andassimo ora, seria l’andata vana: o che trovassimo che cenar vorrebbe, o che giocarebbe o a carte o a dadi, o che stanco da le faccende del giorno si vorria stare in ozio. Non so io l’usanza di questi che ci reggono, che quando più soli sono e stannosi a grattar la pancia, vogliono demostare aver più occupazione: fanno stare un servo alla porta, e che li giuocatori, li ruffiani, li cinedi introduca, e dia agli onesti cittadini e virtuosi uomini repulsa? (IV.2)
In the dialogue between the well-to-do Sicilian merchant Filogono and Ferrarese in *I Suppositi*, Ariosto states that the customs officials commit injustices.

FILOG. Pessimi; ma stimo questo una ciancia verso il fastidio de gli importuni gabellieri che vi usano. Quante volte mi hanno aperto uno forziero che ho meco in nave e quella valigia, e rovistato e voltomì sozopra ciò che io vi ho dentro, e ne la tasca m’hanno voluto vedere e cercare nel seno! Io dubitai qualche volta che non mi scorticassino, per vedere se tra carne e pelle avevo roba da dazio.

FERR. Ho udito che vi si fanno grandi assassinamenti. (IV.3)

Ariosto does not, however, criticise other ducal officials. He simply states that there are judges, podestà, and above all, a most just prince in Ferrara; and that in Ferrara a man may receive justice provided his case is just.

FERR. Ci abbiamo iudici e potestà e sopra tutti uno principe iustissimo. Non dubitare che ti sia mancato di ragione, quando tu l’abbia. (IV.8)

In *Il Negromante*, Ariosto again points out that customs officials commit injustices and, therefore, should be punished.

MASS. Come vorrei volentier che vi desseno questi nostri un di noia, per vederveli castigare. Io non credo che ne siano de’ più molesti al mondo. (III.4)

In addition to revealing the abuse of professional power by customs officials, Ariosto states that once a man obtains a higher administrative position he immediately becomes corrupt.

TEM. Non vedete voi, che subito un divien podestade, commissario, proveditore, gabelliere, giudice, notaio, pagator de li stipendii, che li costumi umani lascia, e prendeli o di lupo o di volpe o di alcun nibio?

FAZIO Cesto è vero.

TEM. E tosto ch’un d’ignobile grado vien consigliere o secretario, e che di commandar a gli altri ha ufficio, non è vero anco che diventa un asino?
FAZIO Verissimo. (I.3)

And, lastly, in *I Studenti*, he derides, as we have noted above, a corrupt priest (IV.4) and a university law professor (I.1).

All these remarks about corrupt officials suggest that the judicial system in the Este duchy might have been in need of reform. The origins of this judicial system dated back to the thirteenth century and were based on the ancient office of the podestà and of several judges and policing officials. Accordingly, only someone who was not a citizen could be appointed to the office of podestà, and only for a term of six months with the possibility of renewal. The duty of the podestà and his officials was to act on whatever the duke decided. The duke could, for example, give direct orders to arrest and imprison, to interrogate and torture, to prescribe sentence and punishment, and/or to withhold the right of appeal or petition. If the duke was not available to issue these orders, he could nominate the Council of Justice to act on his behalf.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a very similar judicial system was still in effect in the Este duchy, though some slight changes had been introduced. Now, in order to serve as podestà one had to be elected and appointed from the noble or professional elites of the state’s major cities—Ferrara, Reggio, or Modena. Because of this, the office was considered to be an honourable and prestigious appointment for aristocrats. In Ferrara, a podestà could be awarded an insignia for good service. These signs of privilege suggest that there was intense competition for judicial posts and for the profits that these posts could bring.

The duties of officials also changed over time. In every city in the Este duchy officials were in charge of the food supply, waterways, passports, roads and bridges, and so on, and they also had the power to impose administrative fines. A squad of guards under a constable or captain had the task of keeping order in the piazza in cities and smaller towns. All types of crimes had to be investigated according to the city statutes and investigations and sentences carried out by the podestà and the criminal court judge. Upon conviction, a man accused of homicide, violent assault, theft, arson, abduction or rape of females, or of offenses against the clergy, blasphemy, conspiracy and/or treason had to pay a fine of over one hundred lire. Hanging was prescribed for theft when it was aggravated by violent action; burning alive after strangulation was prescribed for sodomy, incest, and other “offenses against nature;” any assault
that led to bodily injury could be punished by dismemberment of one or both arms, feet, eyes, or ears; wealthy persons, however, could escape this punishment by paying a monetary fine. It seems that the judicial system under the Este was structured in such a way as to keep control and order in every city of the duchy. However, as is evident in Ariosto’s plays, such a system was not absolute and could not stop ducal officials from becoming corrupt or from committing crimes.

g) Conclusion

Ariosto’s experience as a ducal official in the Garfagnana was both frustrating and illuminating. Although he was not able to rout out criminals and establish order, Ariosto did gain an invaluable insight into the petty corruption that was endemic in the Este duchy. This insight was then translated into a poignant and compelling critique voiced, with great artistic skill, in the plot lines, speeches, and characters of his plays. While he composed his plays in accordance with classical models, his references to current events and customs in Ferrara and his portrayal of contemporary lifestyle in the city reveal his almost revolutionary attempt to reform the society of his day.

Ariosto was commissioned to compose plays for theatrical performance during carnival and this suggests that his works were to be staged for a large and diverse audience. It seems, however, that he consciously seized the opportunity offered by such public representations not only to entertain his audience, but also to criticise his society, all within the freedom to speak, mock, and chastise granted by the season and the spirit of carnival. The application of Bakhtin’s theory of carnival in the analysis of Ariosto’s plays demonstrates that Ariosto did, in fact, enrich his plays with carnivalesque forms and subversions in an effort not only to reflect carnival

177 Chambers and Dean, “Introduction” in Clean Hands and Rough Justice, 1-14. On the office of podestà, see Folin, Rinascimento estense, 173-184. See chronicles written between 1450s and early 1500s by Bernardino Zambotti, Diario ferrarese dall’anno 1476-1504; anonymous, Diario Ferrarese dall’anno 1409 sino al 1502 di autori incerti; Ugo Caleffini, Diario di Ugo Caleffini (1471-1494); and Paolo Zerbinati, Chronice di Ferrara quali comenzano del anno 1500 sino al 1527. These diaries were not written for a particular readership. In general, they deal with histories of political affairs and contain records of famine, weather disasters, food supplies, crimes and punishments in Ferrara. In his article “Ferrarese Chroniclers and the Este State, 1490-1505” Trevor Dean provides a brief biography of each diarist and describes the content of the diaries. For a description of the judicial system in the Este state and for its function in the fifteenth century, see Clean Hands and Rough Justice by David S. Chambers and Trevor Dean. For an overview of the Este state in the time of Ariosto, see Sestan’s “Gli Estensi e il loro stato al tempo dell’Ariosto,” 19-33.
license, but also to critique the corruption of the world around him. By creating a second world and a second life outside officialdom in order to celebrate and enjoy temporary freedom from the established order, by temporarily suspending all hierarchical ranks, privileges, norms and prohibitions, Ariosto was able to communicate and criticise what he would not have been able to critique in ordinary everyday life at other times of the year.

In addition, the acting out of carnival license in Ariosto’s plays shows that he modified the role of servants, inasmuch as they gained the ability to work independently and/or in groups, in order to control and manipulate their master. The servants in his plays are free to criticise and deride authority; and they play an indispensable function in establishing a connection between the city and court. In his plays Ariosto also introduced members of marginalised sectors of society, such as the exiled Jew and the concubine-prostitute-procuress, in order to indicate that they had skills similar to those of the servants. While they assist their employers and masters, these servants and these marginalised groups openly deride and debase them.

It is hard to determine whether Ariosto’s intention to critique and thus to reform his society through his works for the stage was successful or not, but the fact that his plays were performed several times, that they enjoyed many editions even during his lifetime, that they were imitated by his contemporaries and studied in the following centuries, and that they still attract the interest of modern scholars suggests that Ariosto’s efforts did reach and touch a very vast audience and thus, in a way, contributed to an awareness, if not also a discussion, of the social problems he was trying to address. The carnivalesque subversions and derisions identified and outlined by Mikhail Bakhtin thus served Ariosto’s purpose in both a literary and a social context.
Chapter 3

Billingsgate Speech in Ariosto’s Comedies

This chapter will examine the language in Ludovico Ariosto’s plays by applying Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of billingsgate speech as a form of carnivalesque subversion. According to Bakhtin, the third distinct form of humorous popular culture consists of various categories of billingsgate, or coarse and abusive language, and is closely interwoven with the concept of grotesque realism. This chapter will thus analyze the abusive, insulting, and cursing words and indecent and obscene expressions present in the plays in order to demonstrate their function and purposes in the economy of the works. The proposed approach will show that Ariosto purposefully sprinkled his plays with this sort of language in an effort both to entertain his audiences and to reform the society of his day.

a) Bakhtin’s Categories of Billingsgate Speech and Grotesque Realism

When tracing the development of folk humour in early modern European countries, Mikhail Bakhtin defined three distinct forms of humorous popular culture—ritual spectacles, comic verbal compositions, and various types of billingsgate, or coarse and abusive language. The examination of the first two types—ritual spectacles and comic verbal compositions—was carried out in the previous chapter and established a basis for the detailed analysis of carnivalesque forms and elements of subversion in Ariosto’s plays. In this chapter, the third form of folk humour will serve to outline fundamental traits of carnivalesque language in Ariosto’s dramatic compositions. This form consists of varieties of billingsgate language—so named from the Billingsgate market in London that provides the metonym for this type of speech—such as abusive and insulting words, profanities and oaths, and indecent expressions.

178 Bakhtin, Rabelais and his World, 1-58.
The first category of billingsgate language refers to the use in primitive societies of abusive, cursing, and insulting words that played a prominent role in magic incantations. In ancient times, abusive, cursing, and insulting phrases were part of comic cults. Like carnival laughter, they conveyed an ambivalent message: while humiliating and mortifying, they also revived and renewed. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, however, according to Bakhtin, the use of abusive, cursing, and insulting words underwent some essential transformations; it lost its concrete magical and practical functions and assumed the role of entertainment, thus giving rise to the droll aspect of the carnivalesque world.

Profanities and oaths (jurons), the second category of billingsgate speech, violate the generally accepted norms of society and are thus excluded from formal or official speech. In the Renaissance, profanities and oaths were strictly forbidden by the Church and the State, as well as by humanists, since they generally revolved around parts and organs of the divine body: the Lord’s body, his head, blood, wounds, or cherished relics of saints and martyrs preserved in churches. This style of speech was thus seen as pollution of language and in late sixteenth-century Italy was considered heretical. The strict prohibition against profanities and oaths,

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179 In Ferrara, the punishment for blasphemy was truly severe. According to the Ferrarese chronicler Paolo Zerbinati, on 16 November 1525 (during the reign of Alfonso d’Este) a servant of a court gentleman was punished for blasphemy. First his tongue was nailed and then the servant was chained to the court door for two hours. Despite ducale decree and the punishment meted out by Zerbinati, people clearly did not stop from polluting their speeches with blasphemy. Two days later, on 18 November 1525, a certain Belunzi was punished for blasphemy as well. Zerbinati describes the two cases as follows: “Luni adì 16 detto è stato posto in gioa, et inchiodata la lingua ad un servitore de un gentilhuomo di corte sopra un tribunale in piazza per mano del boia, e poi incatenato su la porta della corte del duca, per spatio di due hore, per havere biastemato Dio contro la crida ducale fatta novamente, et adì 18 fu fatto il simile ad uno di Belunzi per havere biastemato Dio”. For information on punishments, see Zerbinati, Croniche di Ferrara quali comenzano del anno 1500 sino al 1527, 161. In Venice, similar punishments for blasphemy were carried out in public in order to discipline the populace. According to the Venetian chronicler Marin Sanudo’s account, in the summer of 1519 the Venetian state punished a priest for such a crime. The priest was placed on a barge and was driven up the Grand Canal, while criers announced his crime. Then he was brought to the city’s commercial center, where his tongue was placed in a vise. After which, he made a public procession to the Piazza San Marco where magistrates waited for him to put a hat painted with devils on his head. Then the priest was placed in a cage and was transported up to the campanile of San Marco, where he hung for ten days. After ten days, he was brought down and placed in prison for ten years. Sanudo describes this punishment as follows: “In questa matina, justa la sententia fata per el reverendissimo Patriarcha nostro, contra quel pre ... oficiava a San Cassan, qual biastemò ... hor fu posto sopra una piata, cridando per Canal grando la sua colpa, poi per terra menato a l’hostaria di[Bo] in Rialto, dove fu posto la lengua in giova, et conduto a San Marco, dove fo su uno soler posto, e con una corona dipenta con diavoli fu posto sopra uno soler, et stete fino hore 22 e con la lengua in giova, la qual era molto negra, demun fu posto in una cheba, e tirato al campaniel di San Marco dove starà per 10 zorni, demun sarà posto in una preson a San Marco ditta Frescha zoja, dove dia star per anni 10 serato a pan et aqua” cited in Horodowich, Language and Statecraft in Early Modern Venice, 56.

180 Horodowich, Language and Statecraft in Early Modern Venice, 56-90.
however, strengthened their use in informal language because such use signified a breach and a rejection of the established norms. As a result, profanities and oaths proliferate in the familiar speech of the marketplace, where a relaxed atmosphere allows a person to disregard established norms of verbal etiquette and where people usually address each other informally, at times even using abusive words with affection. Eventually adapted for carnival speech, profanities and oaths became ambiguous and, consequently, humorous.

The third category of billingsgate speech is essentially similar to the first and consists of abusive, cursing, and insulting words. This type, however, enriched its reservoir of indecent and obscene phrases by making reference to specific parts of the human, not the divine or saintly, body, and especially the sexual organs, using terms from the familiar language of the marketplace that radically differed from the style of formal and official conversation.\(^{181}\)

All these types of familiar speech of the marketplace were used profusely in carnival celebrations where an informal style of speech was the prevalent form of communication. At carnival time people could engage in mutual mockery because hierarchical distinctions, privileges, norms, and prohibitions were temporarily suspended. It is essential to point out that the familiar style of communication was free of malicious intent, so much so that abusive and insulting words and indecent expressions could even be used with affection among participants at carnival. Their purpose was to saturate and reflect the spoken word with the spirit of the season.\(^{182}\)

In addition to outlining billingsgate language, Bakhtin formulated the concept of grotesque realism that was comprehensively examined in the second chapter of this thesis in the analysis of carnivalesque forms and elements of subversion. In this third chapter, however, the concept of grotesque realism will serve to interpret the functionality of billingsgate speech in Ariosto’s plays since verbal abuses, insults, curses, and indecent and obscene expressions have a direct link with carnivalesque bodily images and the concept of degradation.

*b) Abusive Phrases, Cursing, and Indecent Expressions in Ariosto’s Plays*

\(^{182}\) Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 16-17.
All of Ariosto’s plays are composed in line with classical models; they contain elements from the medieval tradition of novella and are enriched with elements of realism reflecting mores and customs of the society of his day. In addition, they are generously suffused with billingsgate speech and elements of grotesque realism in order to portray the carnival spirit effectively. Ariosto’s plays, in fact, were composed to be performed during the carnival season. The use of billingsgate speech in Ariosto’s plays, therefore, should be viewed as a reflection of carnival celebrations in sixteenth-century Ferrara.

(i) Celebrations of Festivals

In the Renaissance, seasonal festivals were an indispensable part of social life. Such celebrations not only delineate the collective structure of society, but also demonstrate the functions and purposes of festivals. Broadly speaking, there are two types of festivals—official and unofficial—and they both display specific characteristics. Official festivals in Renaissance Italy were generally organized by the Church and/or the State. They usually included religious processions and/or civic pageantry. The main purposes of such celebrations were to display hierarchical ranks and categories of the social structure, to reinforce social order, and to promote feelings of communal or corporate solidarity. Unofficial festivals such as carnival, instead, do not depend on Church or State to organize them and so tend to temporarily suspend hierarchical boundaries, established norms, and local customs.

In northern and central Italy, the palio or paglio race was held annually on religious feast days. The palio race derived its name from its prize—the brocade silk or velvet banners known as palii from the Latin pallium (cloth). Each April in Ferrara, for example, the palio race was

\[183\] Bristol, Carnival and Theatre, 29-60.

\[184\] Tobey, “The Palio Banner and the Visual Culture of Horse Racing in Renaissance Italy,” 1269. For a general discussion of public celebrations in fifteenth-century Ferrara, see Rosenberg, “The Use of Celebrations in Public and Semi-Public Affairs in Fifteenth-Century Ferrara,” 521-435; and “In the Footsteps of the Prince: A Look at Renaissance Ferrara,” 21-63. For a comprehensive study of Ferrara in the time of Ariosto, see Piromalli’s La cultura a Ferrara al tempo di Ludovico Ariosto; and Gundersheimer’s Ferrara the Style of Renaissance Despotism.
run in honour of Ferrara’s patron saint, Saint George. The tradition of *palio* races began in 1279—about twenty years after the Este family obtained control of the city. The victors of the horse race, usually noblemen, were awarded three prizes: the first rider received a piece of elegant cloth—the brocade silk or velvet banner; the second rider received a roasted pig, and the third a rooster. In 1456, Borso d’ Este (r. 1450-1471) expanded the original horse race by introducing a number of supplementary races. Accordingly, the traditional race of *barbari* (Arabian horses from the Barbary Coast) was followed by races of donkeys, men, and women. This expanded *palio* race run by both upper and lower class members of society remained in place during the reign of Ercole I d’ Este (r. 1471-1505). The chronicler Ugo Caleffini describes the annual *palio* race of 1475 as follows:

Luni a di 24 de aprile, che fu il di de sancto Zorzo, patrone de questa alma citade de Ferrara, lo excellentissimo duca messer Hercole fece correre, secondo usanza, la matina il palio de pano d’oro cremisino arizato, foderato de varo tutto, de braza quatordice, cum uno bello cemero sopra. Lo quale se commenzò a corere in lo burgo de la Piopa de Ferrara, de là da San Zoanne, dreto la via che vene a la porta. Et fu corso per li barbari insino apreso le fosse de Castel Thealdo de Ferrara, secondo uxanza, per 19 barbari. Et vinselo il barbaro de l’illustre messer lo marchese de Mantoa, cioè marchese Ludovico da Gonzaga, correndo sempre dreto la via Grande insino al palio. Et lo barbaro de lo illustre messer Sigismondo, fratello del duca, havé la porcheta arosto perché fu secondo. Et lo barbaro del duca lo galo perché fu terzo, secondo uxanza. .... Et in dicto / di de san Zorzo, doppoi disenare, per suso la dicta via se corseno, che fece correre secondo usanza il prenominato duca, li infrascripti palii. Ciòe per li primi li aseni cum li homeni a cavallo, commenzoando a li rastelli de la porta de Sota da Ferrara dentro, dreto la via Grande et per quella correndo insino per mezo la porta de la Gosmaria de Ferrara, sete braza de pano verde. Per li segondi li homini che commenzoano per mezo la porta de San Pietro per insino a la Gosmaria et fu, il suo, braza sete de pano rosso, correndo per suso il Sabione pure dreto la via Grande. Et per lo terzo pretio corseno le femene braza sete de

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185 According to legendary sources that date from the sixth century, George, an officer in the Christian militia, was captured and martyred under either the Persian emperor Dacian or the Roman emperor Diocletian. While in the custody of his executioners, he performed miracles. In 1089, George was thought to have supported several Crusades. See Shemek, *Ladies Errant*, 34. For a comprehensive discussion of Saint George’s biography and the sources of his legend, see Toschi’s *La leggenda di San Giorgio nei canti popolari italiani* (1964).


187 Ferrara’s Palio di San Giorgio was usually run on 24 April each year. The Este Family established the *palio* race in 1279 and it remained in place until it was discontinued in 1860. In 1967 the *palio* race was revived by the city of Ferrara. For a concise analysis of the *palio* in Renaissance Italy, see Elizabeth Tobey’s article “The *Palio* Banner and the Visual Culture of Horse Racing in Renaissance Italy.”
According to Caleffini’s account of the *palio* of San Giorgio, the winning rider was the marquis of Mantua, Ludovico Gonzaga (r. 1444-1478), who received a *palio* banner made of a gold brocade cloth, the second-place rider was Sigismondo d’Este (1433-1507), Ercole I’s brother, who was awarded a roasted pig, and the third-place winner who took home the rooster was the duke himself, Ercole I d’Este. In the second, third, and fourth races, that is, the races that included donkeys mounted by jockeys, men, and women, three prizes were awarded: seven ells of green fabric, seven ells of red fabric, and seven ells of green fabric. It is commonly accepted that in the third and fourth races the competitors were, respectively, local Jewish males and local prostitutes.

The San Giorgio races thus exhibit and reaffirm the social hierarchy of superiority and inferiority in which every member of society has a determinate place. They also exhibit the ruling and noble families’s dominance, order, and wealth. Behind this display of social class and order, there is an overt reaffirmation of the Este family’s oligarchic rule over the city.

The San Giorgio *palio* was not the only event that demonstrated the power of a vertically organized social structure in Ferrara. There were other *palio* races that also saw the participation of the marginalized sector in Ferrara. From the late thirteenth century to the mid-fifteenth, the local prostitutes regularly performed in public races throughout Italy and other European regions. And so did Jews—in 1467, Pope Paul II Barbo (r. 1464-1471) instituted Roman races that included a derisive race for Roman Jews. In Ferrara, as we have seen, Jews were also forced to run in the *palio*.

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188 Caleffini, *Croniche 1471-1494*, 105-106.
189 In the description of the painting depicting the San Giorgio *palio* on the walls of the Palazzo Schifanoia, Attilio Milano writes that: “nelle corse effettuate alla presenza della corte e del popolo si nota—fra quella del palio a destra e quella delle meretrici a sinistra—una corsa di uomini seminudi, comunemente considerati ebrei” (458-459).
190 Deanna Shemek, “Circular Definitions,” 17-44.
191 During the carnival season, writes Peter Burke, the Jews were “pelted with mud and stones on their annual race through Rome” (187).
Jews had been living in Italy since the time of the ancient Roman Empire. By the end of the fifteenth century, however, and in the wake of the expulsion of Jews from Spain (1492) and Portugal (1497), Jewish communities in the peninsula had grown significantly and their presence became remarkably evident. Although Italian rulers welcomed Jews into their cities—Ancona, Ferrara, Mantua, and Venice to name but a few—they expected Jews to make a significant contribution to the development of the economy. This, however, was difficult for Jews because they were explicitly marginalized and their economic activities severely curtailed. These restrictions were especially noticeable in the sixteenth century. On 14 July 1555, two months after he ascended to the papacy, Paul IV Carafa (r. 1555-1559), issued the bull *Cum nimis absurdum* that dramatically changed the living conditions of Jews not only in the papal territories, but also in other Italian states. As a result of the bull, Jews were separated from Christians and forced to live in ghettos apart from them; they were not allowed to own real estate and were obliged to sell immediately any property they owned; they were compelled to wear a yellow insignia to identify them visually to passers-by. In addition, they were forbidden to employ Christian nursemaids or servants, or to gamble, eat, converse, or bathe in the company of Christians.

Prostitutes, also, had to adhere to particular restrictions imposed by the State and the Church. In Ferrara, as well as in other Italian cities, they were forbidden to touch food in the markets and had to wear distinguishing signs—sleeve bands made of yellow fabric, a yellow veil, or bells on their clothing—in order to make them easily recognizable in the crowd. As in the case of Jews, prostitutes too were constrained to live and work in a restricted area of the city.

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193 According to Bonfil’s studies of the ghettos in Italy, soon after the publication of the bull, the Jews were confined to live in ghettos. In Rome, the Jews lived in ghettos from 1555 until the ghetto gates and walls were removed in 1846. In other territories of Italy, the establishment of ghettos was as follows: Venice 1516; Florence 1571; Mirandola 1602; Verona 1602; Padua 1603; Mantua 1612; Rovigo 1613; Ferrara 1624; Modena 1638; Urbino, Pesaro, Senigallia 1634; Este 1666; Reggio Emilia 1670; Conegliano Veneto 1675; Turin 1679; Casale Monferrato 1724; Vercelli 1725; Acqui 1731; Moncalvo 1732; Finale 1736; and Correggio 1779.

194 Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, 67. The list of restrictions is much longer and it was expanded throughout the centuries. For a comprehensive study of the Jews in Italy, see Bonfil’s edition; Roth’s *The Jews in the Renaissance*, and Milano’s *Storia degli ebrei in Italia*; Bonfil, “Judeo-Christian Cultural Relations in Cinquecento Ferrara,” 301-319; Hughes, “Distinguishing Signs: Ear-Rings, Jews and Franciscan Rhetoric in the Italian Renaissance City,” 3-59.

To reinforce the marginalization of Jews and prostitutes, rulers involved them in subservient and demeaning activities, such as the *palio* race. The chronicler Caleffini recounts several races in which men and women—possibly Jews and prostitutes—competed. While describing such races, Caleffini explicitly defines the race runners. In one such account, he writes that on 29 June 1480 Duke Ercole I offered the citizens three different races: the first featured horses, the second men, and the third women.

In such publicly celebrated and state sponsored events, the social hierarchy was clearly evident: Caleffini points out that the ruling elite was “bene in ordine et in punto” and implies that the marginalized sector of society (the lower class men and women who raced) was the opposite. The event and the way it was received by the spectators (in this case, Caleffini) clearly point to social disciplining and to its use as a way of promoting social cohesion.

Evidence of the importance of social hierarchy in Ferrara is still visible on the frescoed walls of Ferrara’s Palazzo Schifanoia. Above the door on the east wall of its *Sala dei mesi* there is a depiction of the Palio di San Giorgio painted by Francesco del Cossa in 1467-1469. The painting shows women and men chasing a group of mounted jockeys. Above these runners, court members watch the race. City officials are shown on a raised platform, just slightly above court members, while still further above, noble ladies watch the spectacle from high up on palace balconies.

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196 Caleffini, *Croniche 1471-1494*, 336.
This strict imposition of social hierarchical boundaries, however, was temporarily suspended during the carnival season. In Ferrara and other parts of Italy, the celebration of carnival was an indispensable part of life. The annual carnival season usually started in January and lasted until Shrove Tuesday; it was essentially a celebration of life and excess in anticipation of the penitential fast of Lent that started with Ash Wednesday. In general, it was a time of festive abundance and overindulgence—there was massive eating and drinking. It was the occasion for masquerade, disguise, role-reversal, gender-switching, and expression of verbal and physical aggression. Moreover, it was a time when, for once, a person could voice one’s thoughts with relative impunity. The place of the carnival celebration was the open air in the city centre or the marketplace. Carnival, therefore, may be viewed as an extensive play in which the streets and squares became stages, the city turned into a theatre, and its inhabitants became the cast of players.

In general terms, the main purpose of the carnival celebration was to eliminate, destroy, and drive out all that was evil, harmful, sinful, and negative that had accumulated during the year in order to start living afresh, with a purified soul and positive thoughts. This was accomplished through a series of ceremonies that usually took place in the central squares or the marketplace during the last days of the carnival season. One of these ceremonies was the performance of a play in which the character Carnival—usually represented as a cheerful fat man—suffered a

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198 Various crimes were committed by people in disguise during the carnival season. The chronicler Caleffini provides a wealth of information on such crimes in his Croniche 1471-1494. For instance, on 3 February 1478 a banker was killed by a man in disguise and other crimes were also committed on the same day. Caleffini describes it as follows: “Martì ò di tri de febraro 1478 lo illustrissimo et excellentissimo signore nostro missere Hercole fece dansare suso la sua salla grande del suo palatio a dì suprascrito, da il doppoi disenare insino a le sete hore de nocte, dando cena a tute le damiselle et done che a dicta festa furno del suo che fu il dì ultimo del Carnevale, et fu il zorno de messer san Biasio. In lo qual zorno, la maitina, andando a la festa del sancto, Rigo banchiero da Ferrara che fu de Gualtiero da San Vitale, da una mascara malamente suso la facia fu ferito. Et altri assai mali da mascare in quel zorno et in precedenti fu facto.” (285) Although the duke frequently issued edicts attempting to limit the practices of wearing masks and of bearing arms during the carnival season, the evidence of several crimes outlined by Caleffini suggests that during the carnival season people ignored ducal decrees and took advantage of carnival freedom. It seems that in the first half of the sixteenth century, in Ferrara people still committed crimes while wearing carnival masks. The chronicler Zerbinati writes that a decree was issued prohibiting carrying arms or sticks during the carnival season of 1518: “adi 29 detto [January] si cominciò ad andare in maschera, e fu fatto la crida delle mascare, che non si portassero armi di sorte alcuna, né bastoni, ma solo bachette sottile.” (143).

199 Bristol, Carnival and Theatre, 40-58; Burke, Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe, 178-185; Toschi, Tradizioni popolari italiane, 75-83; and Bernardi, Carnevale, quaesima, pasqua rito e dramma nell’età moderna (1500-1900); see also a collection of articles on carnival tradition in Chiabò and Doglio’s edition of Il Carnevale: dalla tradizione arcaica alla traduzione colta del Rinascimento.

200 Toschi, Le origini del teatro italiano, 228-229.
mock trial, made a mock confession and a mock testament, and then was given a mock execution carried out by destroying a large puppet representing the Carnival character, and an elaborate mock funeral. Although the performance of a mock trial, confession, testament, execution, and funeral of Carnival had its particular characteristics depending on the customs and tastes of the various Italian states, in general it followed a standard format.

Towards the end of the carnival season, the character Carnival was caught, handcuffed, and brought to a public court presided over and attended by a group of judges, lawyers, guards, and citizens. To provide Carnival with some “moral support,” he was generally accompanied and comforted by his wife and his friends. The judges would read the accusations levelled against him that would then justify his death sentence. At this point Carnival would redact his testament that not only revealed his final intentions, but also offered advice and recommendations on how to improve one’s conduct. His testament, therefore, functioned as a public denunciation and a collective liberation from the evils perpetrated by individual members. One of the earliest literary records of such a testament by Carnival dates from the sixteenth century. It is composed in verse form by an anonymous author. In it, Carnival gives advice to women and reveals the flaws of youths:

A voi maggior rispetto haver conviene,  
donne, però ch’el vostro honor vi gioca,  
et non fermate in quegli vostra speme  
ne i quali discrezio vedete poca,  
ch’amore al mondo alcun tristo mantiene  
ove tristizia ogni suo bene aloca,  
credete à me fanciulle che non favolo,  
che meglio assai di lor, credo sia ’l diavolo.  
Sono alcun giovinetti adesso nati,  
che ben non sanno se son vivi ò morti  
et voglion esser detti innamorati,  
et che sian giunti à gl’amorosi porti,  
facendo contra amor mille peccati,  
mille ingiurie, mill’onte, et mille torti,  
che di crudel non han pur i centesmi,

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201 Toschi, Le origini del teatro italiano, 228-230.  
After the public confession and testament, saturated with criticism directed at everyone, there was a mock execution. Usually a giant puppet filled with straw and dressed as a man was publicly burnt, hanged, or drowned. The final catharsis was reached through a mock funeral ceremony that symbolized the destruction of everything evil, sick, and old. The destruction of Carnival through the public trial, confession, testament, execution, and funeral can be seen as a collective confession and absolution of sins.

In Italy, the character Carnival was not only represented by a cheerful fat man, but he was also impersonated by an animal—a wolf, dog, rooster, hare, cat, bull, ox, cow, sheep, turkey, donkey, and others—in accordance with ancient popular culture. In Antiquity, the sacrifice of domestic animals was used to consecrate the land prior to sowing. For instance, a pig would be slaughtered and cut into pieces and then spread on the field as an offering for fertility. Mock testaments of animals, replete with satire, were also composed. The earliest record of such a testament is the *Testamentum porcelli* (the Will of the Little Pig) composed in Latin in the fourth century, in which a pig named Grunnius Corocotta Porcellus bequeaths parts of his body to different members of society—his bristles to shoemakers, his ears to the deaf, his tongue to lawyers, and so on until he gives away his entire body. When the pig bestows his reproductive organs there is, clearly, a wealth of obscene allusions. One of the most recent records of such a testament is the *Testamento del tacchino*. In some Italian regions as late as the nineteenth century, a turkey or a chicken was consecrated to the fertility of the fields. According to Toschi, this was usually done on the last day of carnival and the ceremony was quite elaborate. He describes it as follows:

Nell’ultima domenica di Carnevale, in Vasto (Abruzzo) si fa una mascherata speciale. Tutti in costume da Turchi e alla turchesa bardati i cavalli, la cavalcata è preceduta da un re e da una regina. I cavalieri hanno sciabole lunghe di legno, dipinte, argentate, dorate. Passando sotto le finestre delle loro belle, hanno da tagliare il collo dei polli che quelle

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205 For a comprehensive analysis of testaments, see Toschi’s study of carnival in *Le origini del teatro italiano*, 248-261.
appendono ai davanzali. I valorosi, e sono tutti, s’impadroniscono così dei polli decapitati.  

After these street-side sacrifices, one of the carnival participants would read the testament of the turkey. Here is an example of one such testament composed by citizens of Tonco in Monferrato:

Il pitù, prima di sacrificarsi per la salute dell’amato paese, vuol fare alcuni ammonimenti a chi ne ha maggior bisogno ed avverte Tizio di non continuare a perdere il suo tempo sotto la finestra della Maria, Caio di badar bene che c’è chi vuol prendergli la Giulia, Sempronio di farsi amico dell’acqua e di lasciare il vino e così via.

Clearly, then, the testament not only marks the end of the carnival season, but also discloses the private life and flaws of the local citizens. The testament can thus be interpreted as a social critique since it derides human foibles and seeks to improve people.

In sixteenth-century Ferrara, carnival celebration was not limited to the marketplace. The Este family and the local nobility enjoyed carnival both privately and publicly. According to the courtier Bernardino Prosperi, during the carnival season of 1506 the newly enthroned Duke Alfonso d’Este (r. 1505-1534) organized a carnivalesque slaughtering of a pig. In the courtyard of the ducal palace a judges’ platform had been erected on which a pig was tied up. Then twelve servants dressed as warriors and armed with large sticks, but with eyes covered, went up on the platform to slaughter the animal. The one who killed the pig received the carcass as a prize.

Along with celebrating the carnival season privately in the palace, as we have just seen, the Este rulers also celebrated carnival publicly outside their palace and especially in the open area in front of the ducal palace so that all the courtiers, nobles, and Este family members might be able to attend and participate. Usually there were mock chivalry battles, contests of catching a...
goose while riding a horse, or mock battles in which a host of courtiers armed with sticks would fight against a group of people armed with eggs. The identities of the participants were disguised by masks and carnivalesque outfits.\textsuperscript{209}

The carnival season allowed people to enjoy temporary freedom from the established hierarchical structure of society, its norms, and customs. This was a collective celebration of a new and better life accomplished through a collective confession of sins and a collective social critique. In Ariosto’s plays, this celebration of a temporary suspension of the rigid hierarchy of sixteenth-century Ferrara is evident in the use of carnivalesque language replete with abusive phrases, cursing, indecent expressions, and obscene allusions, all in an attempt to entertain his audience, critique human foibles, and reform society.

Ariosto’s plays depict a microcosm of contemporary Ferrarese society consisting of ducal officials, well-to-do merchants, servants, parasites, and criminals. His plays, therefore, bring to the stage two distinct social classes based on their economic status: the higher or wealthy sector that includes merchants, lawyers, government officials and the lower or poorer sector of society that consists of servants, parasites, and criminals. To demonstrate in his plays a temporary suspension of all the hierarchical ranks, privileges, norms, and prohibitions, Ariosto establishes a free and frank communication between members of the higher and lower classes. While they converse with each other, members of the higher and lower ranks ignore the established norms of etiquette and decency that would normally be enforced at other times of the year. Their familiar speech is abundantly enriched with abusive phrases, cursing, insults and indecent and obscene expressions, and this, in turn, illustrates the carnivalesque celebration of the world turned “upside down.”

(i) Abusive, Insulting, and Cursing Words

The use of abusive, insulting, and cursing words and phrases is evident in all of Ariosto’s plays. In them, servants either disobey or take control of their masters and, in so doing, affect their counterparts’ behaviour and actions. Consequently, masters act irrationally, allowing

\textsuperscript{209} Catalano, \textit{Vita di Ludovico Ariosto}, vol. 1, 492-494.
themselves to be mocked and ridiculed by their servants. In La Cassaria, while the old master Crisobolo is out of town on a business trip, his servant Volpino takes control of Crisobolo’s son Erofilo and advises him to use Crisobolo’s clothes to dress Trappola, Volpino’s friend, as a well-to-do merchant, then send him to take the coffer with gold brocade worth about two thousand ducats, stolen from Crisobolo’s room, to the procurer Lucrano, and to use it as a deposit for the purchase of Eulalia, Erofilo’s beloved. Erofilo submissively follows Volpino’s scheme ignoring possible complications. Soon after the coffer has been taken to the procurer, Crisobolo unexpectedly arrives home and discovers that the coffer has been stolen. Crisobolo immediately loses his temper and insults his servants by calling them rascals, poltroons, gallows-birds, and donkeys:

VOLP. Non l’hai, dico, che è stata rubata.
CRISOB. Ah misero e infelice Crisobolo! Lassa or cura de la tua casa a questi gaglioffi, a questi poltroni, a questi impiccati! Potevo non meno lassarvi tanti asini. (IV.2, emphasis added)

While wearing Crisobolo’s clothes and pretending to be a well-to-do merchant, Trappola tries to imitate the formal style of speech of the wealthier merchant class so as to assume the higher social status of the well-to-do merchant and thus, implicitly, marks out the hierarchical boundary between what he purports to be—a “well-to-do merchant”—and what he is—a member of the lower class. However, seeing that the procurer Lucrano, with whom he is speaking, uses an informal type of language imbued with abuses and insults, Trappola—a supposed “well-to-do merchant”—is forced to decorate his speech with abusive, insulting, and cursing words in order to match that of the procurer and thus be able to make a deal with him. Trappola, therefore, transgresses the established hierarchical boundaries and, in so doing, derides and degrades both well-to-do merchants and members of the criminal world.

TRAP. – Non può star molto discosto: questa è pur la casa grande, all’incontro de la quale mi è detto che li abita. –
LUCR. Non deve trovar albergo, per quel ch’io sento.

210 All references to Ariosto’s plays, excluding the incomplete play I Studenti, will be given in parentheses in the text and will be taken from Segre’s edition of the Commedie. The references to I Studenti, however, will be drawn from Vallone’s edition of the Opere minori since Segre’s edition does not include the incomplete play.
TRAP. – Oh veggio a tempo costui, che mi saprà forse chiarire, perché non son qui molto pratico. – Dimmi, *omo da bene*.

LUCR. Tu dimostri per certo di non esser molto pratico, che m’hai chiamato per un nome, che né a me né a mio padre né ad alcun del sangue mio fu mai più detto.

TRAP. Perdonami, che non t’avevo ben mirato: io mi emenderò. Dimmi, *tristo omo, d’origine pessima* ...; ma, per Dio, tu sei quel forse proprio ch’io cerco, o fratello o cugin suo, o del suo parentado almeno.

LUCR. Potrebbe essere; e chi cerchi tu?

TRAP. *Un baro, un pergiuro, unoomicidiale*.

LUCR. Va piano, che sei per la via di trovarlo. Come è il proprio nome?

TRAP. El nome ..., ha nome ..., or or l’avevo in bocca: non so che me n’abbi fatto.

LUCR. O ingiottito o sputato l’hai.

TRAP. Sputato l’ho forse, ingiottito no, che cibo di tanto fetore non potrei mandare ne lo stomaco senza vomitarlo poi subito.

LUCR. Coglilo adunque de la polvere.

TRAP. Ben tel saprò con tanti contrasegni dimostrare, che non sarà bisogno che del proprio nome si cerchi: è *bestemmiatore e bugiardo*.

LUCR. Queste son de le appartenienze al mio essercizio.

TRAP. *Ladro, falsamonete, tagliaborse*.

LUCR. È forse tristo guadagno saper giocare de terza.

TRAP. È *ruffiano*.

LUCR. La principal de l’arte mia.

TRAP. *Reportatore, maldicente, seminatore di scandali e di zizanie*.

LUCR. Se noi fussimo in corte di Roma, si potria dubitare di chi tu cercassi; ma in Metellino non puoi cercare se non di me, si che ’l mio proprio nome ti vo’ ricordare anco mi chiamo Lucrano.

TRAP. Lucrano, si, si, *Lucrano, col malanno*. (III.3, emphasis added)

In *I Suppositi*, servants also transgress their boundaries by overtly insulting and degrading their masters and other members of the higher class. In Act IV, Filogono, a Sicilian merchant, arrives in Ferrara to visit his son Erostrato. To his surprise, Filogono finds out that another man resides in his son’s house and pretends to be him, Filogono. To vent his frustrations, Filogono speaks with his servant Lico and Ferrarese, a citizen of Ferrara.

FILOG. Che ti pare, Lico mio, di queste cose?

LICO Che vuoi che me ne paia se non male? Non mi piacque mai questo nome Ferrara; ma veggio ora che sono assai peggiori gli effetti, che non è la nominanza.

FERR. Hai torto a dir male de la terra nostra: questi, che vi fanno ingiuria, non sono Ferraresi, per quanto vedo al loro idioma.

LICO *Tutti ne avete colpa, e più gli uffiziali vostri, che comportano queste barcherie ne la sua terra*.

FERR. Che sanno gli uffiziali di queste trame? Credi tu che intendino ogni cosa?
LICO Anzi credo che intendino pochissimo, e mal volentieri, dove guadagno non vedono. Dovrebbeno aprir li occhi, et aver le orecchie più patenti che non hanno le porte l’osterie.
FILOG. Taci, bestia; parla de’ fatti tuoi.
LICO Ho paura, se Iddio non ci aiuta, che amendua pareremo come hai detto. (IV.6, emphasis added)

In expressing his opinion about the current situation, the servant Lico not only insults Ferrarese officials by accusing them of corruption, but also openly derides his master by calling him a beast.

There is another example in this play that demonstrates the servants’ transgression of hierarchical boundaries that explicitly mocks and degrades members of the higher class. In order to mock and debase the well-known Ferrarese lawyer Cleandro, the servant Dulippo (false Erostrato) plays a prank on him. He informs Cleandro that Pasifilo, who is supposed to convince Damone to marry his daughter to Cleandro, gossips about him instead. Naturally, Cleandro loses his temper and becomes furious. As soon as Cleandro sees Pasifilo on the street, he ignores the established norms of etiquette and decency appropriate to his socioeconomic rank and verbally abuses Pasifilo in front of people by calling him a glutton, scoundrel, faithless traitor, drunken lout, rascal, assassin, slouch, and a gallows-bird, in that order.

PASIF. Dio ti dia contento, patron mio singolare.
CLEAN. A te dia quello che meriti.
PASIF. Mi darà la grazia tua e da godere in perpetuo.
CLEAN. Ti darà un laccio che t’impicchi, ghiotto, ribaldo che tu sei.
PASIF. Che io sia ghiotto, tel confesso, ma ribaldo no: hai torto dirmi così, che servitor ti sono.
CLEAN. Né servitore né amico ti voglio.
PASIF. Che t’ho fatto io?
CLEAN. Va alle forche, perfido traditore.
PASIF. Ah Cleandro! pianamente.
CLEAN. Io te ne pagherò: renditi certo, imbriaco, gaglioffo.
PASIF. Io non so di averiti offeso.
CLEAN. Te lo farò bene io sapere a tempo. Lévamiti dinanzi, manigoldo.
PASIF. Cleandro, io non sono però tuo schiavo.
CLEAN. Tu ardisci di aprir la bocca, assassino? Io ti farò ...
PASIF. Che diavolo! Quando io ho ben sofferto e sofferto, che mi farai tu?
CLEAN. Quel ch’io ti farò? S’io non guardassi, poltrone ...
PASIF. Io sono uom da bene quanto tu.
CLEAN. Tu ne menti per la gola, impiccatto. (V.5, emphasis added)
Along with displaying the servants’s transgression of hierarchical boundaries based on socioeconomic status, this play also depicts a temporary suspension of age boundaries. This is evident in the quarrel between the youngest male servant Caprino and the oldest female servant Psiteria, who relentlessly demean each other ignoring the established age-related norms of human communication.

Although this dialogue might sound outrageous and daring—considering that a young boy calls an elderly woman a deaf old hag, ghost, crazy, indiscreet ass, and an ugly witch, while she calls him a gallows-bird, glutton, little rascal, and the devil itself—this informal style of speech filled with abusive and insulting words, however, was acceptable during the carnival season because it was based on a temporary suspension of the established norms.

In *Il Negromante*, the necromancer—an exiled Jew from Spain and therefore a member of the lower sector of society—mercilessly degrades his employers, who are well-to-do merchants. He sees his employers as animals to be used for one’s profit and ranks them into
three different categories, according to the type of profit they can produce for him. His tri-
partite category consists of animals such as pigs; cows and sheep; and horses, dogs, or donkeys. Seeing that his employers—Massimo, Cintio, and Camillo—are wealthy and that they own houses and rich merchandise and so can benefit the necromancer while they are alive, but will be of no use to him once they are dead, the necromancer places them into the third category. In so doing, he openly insults members of the higher sector by comparing them with animals such as horses, dogs, and donkeys.

In *I Studenti* and *La Lena*, the use of abusive and insulting words is not as prominent as it is in Ariosto’s other plays. There are only a couple of examples demonstrating that masters insult their servants when the latter disobey. In *I Studenti*, the young master Eurialo calls his servants Accursio and Pistone a donkey and lout, respectively (I.3; III.1); and in *La Lena*, the old master Illario refers to his servant Corbolo as a donkey (III.2). This rare use of abusive and insulting words in *I Studenti* and *La Lena* does not mean that in these plays Ariosto avoided billingsgate speech altogether, but that he sought to use language to achieve something else. The fact that these plays are much more generously enriched with obscene and indecent language suggests that Ariosto intentionally downplayed abusive and insulting words in order to highlight something else, that is, obscenities and indecencies, as it will be demonstrated in the next section of this chapter.

In addition to peppering his plays with abusive and insulting words, Ariosto also spiced them with curse words and this, again, is directly linked with the grotesque realism identified by Bakhtin in carnival language. In the plays, a substantial use of cursing demonstrates the main principle of grotesque realism, that is, a transferring of all that is elevated, spiritual, ideal, and abstract from the higher level of the cosmic, the spirit, and the mind, to the lower level, that is, to the earthly and material level, and the lower parts of the body. The movement from the higher to the lower level signifies degradation or debasement that leads to destruction of all negative things and to a regeneration or birth of something positive and better.

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211 The necromancer’s categorization of his employers as animals has been examined in line with carnivalesque subversion in the second chapter. In this chapter, therefore, it will be discussed briefly to avoid unnecessary repetition of the same passage.
In Ariosto’s plays, curses are used in order to wish harm on others, that is, in order to wish someone a venereal disease, cancer, plague, a horrible death, or even sentence someone to hell. *La Cassaria* opens with a wealthy merchant-class youth calling upon God in vain, thereby breaking the third Commandment, and a servant replying with a curse that, ironically enough, places the young man in hell:

EROF. Così ve n’andrete, come io v’ho detto, a trovare Filostrato, e farete tutto quello che vi commanderà, e per modo che non mi venga di voi richiamo altrimenti. Ma dove è rimasto il mio pedagogo, il mio maestro, il mio custode saggio? Che vol che v’indugiate a sua posta sino a sera? Ancor non viene? **Per Dio**, che s’io ritorno indietro!... Andate tutti e strascinatemo lo per li capelli. Non vaglion parole con questo asino, né vol, se non per forza di bastone, obedir mai. Vedi che io t’ho fatto uscire.

NEBB. **Sia in malora**: non si poteva senza me finir la festa. Io so bene che ’mporta l’andata, ma non posso più. (I.1, emphasis added)

When the servant Nebbia replies to his young master’s call by sending him to “mala ora”, that is, to perdition and, by extension, to hell and the devil, he is both cursing his master and wishing upon him the punishment God will mete out to those who break the third Commandment. By cursing his master to hell and mentally placing him in the nether regions of the universe, Nebbia debases and destroys the established hierarchical boundaries between the two classes—the servant Nebbia remains “up” on earth while the master Erofilo is cast “down” in hell.

In *I Suppositi*, the parasite Pasifilo curses the lawyer Cleandro for his persistent commitment to fasting by wishing him death.

PASIF. A che ora?
CLEAN. Quando vorrai tu. Ben t’inviterei a desinare meco, ma digiuno oggi che è vigilia di san Nicolò, il quale ho in divozione.

PASIF. (**Digiuna tanto che ti muoi di fame.**)  
CLEAN. Ascolta.  
PASIF. (Parla co’ morti, che digiunano altresì.) (I.2, emphasis added)

Pasifilo’s cursing not only derides Cleandro’s religious beliefs, but also mocks and degrades the anticipated liturgical observance of Lent that lasts for forty days and requires Christians to fast. In the sixteenth century the derision of Lent was one of the main themes of the carnival.
celebrations. It seems that Ariosto intentionally refers to Lent so as to remind his audience that carnival will be over soon and that they will need to observe Lent.

The opening scene of *Il Negromante* also features a case of cursing, this time from a wet-nurse who is unhappy about her charge’s un consummated marriage. As she chats with another servant, she discloses her distress about the apparent impotence of her mistress’s husband, her dismay at her mistress’s lack of sexual satisfaction, and her frustration with the standard practice of arranged marriages in the moneyed and noble classes.

MARG. La nostra Emilia
che fa?
BALIA Pur dianzi si serraro in camera
ella e la madre, et è con esse un medico,
che ci venne oggi, forestiero, e parlano
di secreto.
MARG. Io venia con desiderio
di stare un pezzo pur con lei.
BALIA Mal copia
oggi ne avrai, che tutta è maninconica.
MARG. Che l’è accaduto?
BALIA Quel ch’avea la misera
da aspettar meno: *che nasca una fistola a chi mai fece questo sponsalizio*!
MARG. Ognun sì lo lodava da principio
per un partito de’ miglior che fossino
in questa terra.
BALIA Dar non la potevano,
Margarita mia, peggio.
MARG. È pur bel giovane.
BALIA Altro bisogna.
MARG. Intendo che è ricchissimo.
BALIA Bisogna anch’altro.
MARG. Debe esser spiacevole?
Ma non stia in punta e giostrì di superbia
con esso lui.
BALIA Deh, non temer che giostrino,
che la lancia è spuntata e trista e debole.
MARG. Dunque non le fa il debito egli?
BALIA Il debito, eh?
MARG. Che! non può?
BALIA La infelice è così vergine,
come era inanzi questo sponsalizio.
MARG. Uh che disgrazia!
BALIA È bene una disgrazia
de le maggiori ch’aver possa femina.
MARG. Lasci andar, né però si dia molestia;
potrà ben ...

BALIA Quando potrà ben, se in quindici
tenta di non può?
MARG. Se ne ritruovano,
intendo, alcuni, che stan così deboli
gli anni, e ritornan poi come prima erano.

BALIA Gli anni? Signor! Dunque debbe ella attendere,
a bocca aperta, che le biade naschino
e si maturin poi, s’ella de’ pascersi?
Non era meglio che sedessi in ozio
in casa di suo padre, che venirsene
la misera a marito, non dovendoci
aver se non mangiar, vestire, e simili
cose, ch’aver poteva in abondanzia
col padre ancora? (I.1, emphasis added)

In expressing their frustrations with arranged marriages, the two female servants deride and degrade this traditional custom. By letting the servants express their views on the gender inequality present in contemporary marriage practices, Ariosto is thus able to voice his own social critique while, at the same time, point out that even the working class is unhappy about this practice among the elite. The wet-nurse’s concern for her charge’s sexual satisfaction (or, in this case, dissatisfaction) also suggests the presence of a bond among women that allows female servants to commiserate with their mistresses when the latter find themselves in unhappy marriages that were not of their choosing.

In I Studenti, the servants ignore their master’s orders and, in so doing, affect the life of their counterparts. Some of Eurialo’s servants inform Claudio about the arrival of Lazaro’s wife and daughter and make him believe that Eurialo and Flamminia are deeply in love. This news dramatically distresses Claudio because he loves Flamminia and plans to marry her. Claudio had a nightly tryst with her while he had resided in Lazaro’s house, but then one day when her parents became suspicious of the goings-on they threw him out of their house forcing him to leave Pavia. Claudio left the city, but asked his friend Eurialo to begin negotiations with Lazaro’s family for Flamminia’s hand in marriage. Believing that his beloved Flamminia and his best friend Eurialo have betrayed him, Claudio displays his uncontrolled emotions and behaves irrationally. He curses the day he was born and the mid-wife who did not drown him the moment he was born.
Claudio    Non amandomi
colei che sola al mondo amo, e mancandomi
colui di fede, di che sol fidavomi,
non curo né d’amor né d’amicizia
di persona del mondo. M’abbia in odio
ognuno; ognuno ingannimi e tradiscami;
ch’anch’io vo’ odiar ognuno, e mai non essere
ad alcuno fedele; e donne et uomini,
sia chi si vuol, menar tutti a una regola.
Bonifazio    Questo non è parlar d’uomo ch’abbia anima
maschio.
Claudio    Non so s’io l’abbia maschio o femina:
so ben ch’io l’ho mal contento, e che d’essere
meco gli incresce; et è per far ogni opera
d’abbandonarmi presto, abbandonatomi
avendo quella, ch’a suo modo volgere
lo potea.
Bonifazio    Tal parole non convengono
a voi, ch’altrui mostrar la sapienzia
dovreste, essendo sempre ne le lettere
versato e in tanti esempi de filosofi.
Claudio    Ne’ libri, ohimè! si leggono e si scrivono
molte cose, ch’in fatti poi non reggono.
Bonifazio    Venite almeno in casa e disfogatevi
come vi par, e non state qui in publico,
come fanciul battuto, a versar lacrime;
che s’al fin pur non volete ricevere
da me conforto né consiglio, vogliovi
esser compagno, a lacrimar e piangere.
Claudio    Né in casa, né in Ferrara, Bonifazio,
mi vo’ fermar, se non quanto si carichi
la roba mia, che sia condotta a Mantova,
per drizzarla a Verona; e voglio ir subito
per questo al porto, e poi cercar di bestia
che via mi porti. Né più qui né a Padova
né a Bologna né in terra altra di Studio
mi vo’ lasciar veder; né mai più leggere
testi né chiose; e Baldi, Cini e Bartoli,
e gli altri libri stracciar tutti et ardere.
Che maledetto ‘l di e l’ora possa essere
che’io venni al mondo, e la puttana balia
che nel bagnuol non mi fece sommergere! (II.5, emphasis added)
Claudio’s irrational decision to give up his studies and leave the city not only shows his desperate love for Flamminia, but also reveals his vulnerable and fragile personality. While venting his frustrations he becomes hysterical. By portraying Claudio as an irrational, hysterical youth, Ariosto once again critiques contemporary society and its marriage practices.

Frustrated wealthy young men are not the only ones to curse in I Studenti; servants do it too, but in this case their frustration is directed very clearly at their masters. When the young master Eurialo asks his servant Accursio if his father is still in town, the servant replies by wishing his old master were dead and buried.

_Eurialo_  
_Che monta e monta! Già tanto non montano_  
le ciance tue, che montino un pel d’asino.  
Mio padre è in questa terra.

_Accursio_  
_In terra foss’egli_  
_pur da dover_, com’è suo padre e l’avolo!)  
_Che volete voi dir per questo? (III.3, emphasis added)_

Although the young master does not hear the servant curse against the old master because the words are spoken as an aside, the audience hears them clearly and understands that there are tensions between the old master and the servant. Accursio degrades his old master by sending him ‘downward’ to the grave—in a carnivalesque reversal that we had already seen in Nebbia’s cursing in La Cassaria.

Cursing is used by the members of the lower class in Ariosto’s La Lena, as well, especially by the servant Corbolo and the procuress Lena. Theirs, however, is directed at each other, and not at their social superiors. As they tangle verbally, Corbolo and Lena wish one another a horrible death, that is, they send each other ‘downward’ to the bottom of the earth, to hell. Corbolo’s cursing of Lena is first heard in the opening scene of Act I when his young master Flavio tells him that he urgently needs twenty-five florins to pay for a tryst with his beloved Licinia arranged by the procuress Lena. Corbolo replies by wishing that the procuress might be consumed by fire.

_CORB._  
_Se ti crede, fia un’opera_  
santa che tu l’inganni. **Porca! ch’ardere**  
_la possa il fuoco! Non ha conscienzia,**
While it is not clear whether Corbolo is referring to the fire of a pyre used to burn witches and heretics or to the fires of hell, his antipathy for Lena and her alleged lack of morality is quite evident. The feeling, however, is mutual. When Lena sees Corbolo coming down the street, she yells at him to hurry up and colours her words with curses that wish him dead and in hell: “Spiccati, che spiccata ti sia l’anima! ... Deh, ti venga il malanno!” (II.3)

Lena’s cursing is also directed horizontally along the social hierarchy at her husband Pacifico. In the concluding scene of the play, Lena realizes that she is powerless to change her inferior socioeconomic condition caused partially by her husband and by her social status. She, therefore, finds relief for her desperate circumstances by cursing her husband and wishing him the plague: “Deh, che ti venga il morbo!”; “Deh, manigoldo, ti venga la fistola!” (V.11)

These examples have shown that billingsgate speech consisting of abusive, insulting, and cursing words is very much present in Ariosto’s plays and is used for major purposes, to entertain the audience and to accentuate Ariosto’s critique of contemporary society and its practices. Notably, an application of abusive and insulting words in comedies in order to amuse and instruct the audience was not Ariosto’s innovation; its use is found in both classical and modern plays. In his treatise Dialogo intorno alla nostra lingua (1515) and in the play Clizia (1524) composed in imitation of Plautus’s Casina, Niccolò Machiavelli, to name but one, explicitly recommends employing comical language to delight and benefit/instruct the spectators. In its prologue, Machiavelli expounds on functions of comedies highlighting their effects. Accordingly they are composed in order to benefit and delight the spectators and it is therefore necessary to enrich comedies with words—silly, insulting, or amorous—and to portray the characters that are also silly, slanderous or in love to cause that effect:

Sono trovate le commedie per giovare, e per dilettare agli spettatori. Giova veramente assai a qualunque uomo, e massimamente ai giovanetti, conoscere l’avarizia d’un vecchio, il furore di uno innamorato, gl’inganni di un servo, la gola d’uno parasito, la miseria di un povero, l’ambizione di un ricco, le lusinghe di una meretrice, la poca fede

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212 A comprehensive discussion of Machiavelli’s treatise with his references to Ariosto’s I Suppositi is found in chapter I.
di tutti gli uomini: de’ quali esempi le commedie sono piene, e possonsi tutte queste cose con onestà grandissima rappresentare. Ma volendo dilettare, è necessario muovere gli spettatori a riso, il che non si può fare mantenendo il parlare grave e severo; perché le parole che fanno ridere, sono, o sciocche, o ingiuriose, o amorose. È necessario pertanto rappresentare persone sciocche, malediche, o innamorate, e perciò quelle commedie, che sono piene di queste tre qualità di parole, sono piene di risa; quelle che ne mancano, non trovano chi con il ridere le accompagni.213

In line with functions and effects of the comedy outlined by Machiavelli, Ariosto profusely applies billingsgate language in each of his comedy to such an extent that his plays closely align with carnival spirit and this, in turn, enhances the carnivalesque subversion and suspension of hierarchical boundaries present in his plays. In so doing, Ariosto is able to voice his critical views on contemporary society and its practices.

**ii) Indecent and Obscene Expressions**

Billingsgate speech consisting of indecent and obscene expressions with references to sex and sexual organs is also present in Ariosto’s plays. Similar to abusive, insulting, and cursing words this type of billingsgate has a double significance; it reveals the carnival spirit in Ariosto’s plays and, at the same time, derides and degrades all that is negative and immoral. It does this in an attempt to give birth to something positive and moral, that is, it allows, within the context of carnival, for a critique of human faults.

Sexual billingsgate speech is present in four of Ariosto’s plays, *I Suppositi*, *Il Negromante*, *I Studenti*, and *La Lena*, but not in the first play *La Cassaria*, perhaps because Ariosto’s first play does not portray any examples of the eccentrically lascivious behaviour of youth. In this play, both Eurofilo and Caridoro are deeply in love with two enslaved young women, and so they try to free their beloveds from the sex-trafficking industry in which they currently find themselves. Although the manner in which Eurofilo and Caridoro free their beloveds might seem irrational it nonetheless cannot be viewed as lascivious. The use of sexual billingsgate speech in *La Cassaria*, therefore, would be irrelevant.

Quite the opposite, however, is true for *I Suppositi*, where sexual billingsgate seems to abound, possibly because of the sexual irregularities present in the play. The old and well-known Ferrarese lawyer Cleandro intends to marry the young Polinesta, the daughter of a well-to-do merchant. Although he is in his late sixties, Cleandro hopes that this marriage will produce an heir. For her part, however, the young and still unmarried Polinesta is already satisfying her sexual appetite with her contemporary, the wealthy youth Erostrato (disguised as the servant Dulippo). Seeing that his nightly trysts with Polinesta might soon come to an end because of her forthcoming marriage with Cleandro, Erostrato (the false Dulippo) decides to block Cleandro’s plan. While he waits for an opportunity to do so, he overtly mocks and degrades his elderly rival. In his conversation, saturated with obscene references, the false servant Dulippo (Erostrato) criticises Cleandro’s intentions to marry a young woman by pointing out the suitor’s advanced age, his frugal habits, and his penchant for copulating with a member of the same sex.

DULIP. ... E dice [Pasifilo] tutti li mali che si è possibile imaginarsi di te.
CLEAN. A chi?
DULIP. A Damone et a Polinesta ancora.
CLEAN. Ah ribaldo! E che dice egli!
DULIP. Quanto si può dir peggio.
CLEAN. O Dio!
DULIP. **Che tu sei il più avaro e misero uomo che nascesse mai, e che tu la farai morire di fame.**
CLEAN. Pasifilo dice questo di me?
DULIP. Di questo el padre si cura poco, che ben sapeva che, sendo tu de la professione che tu sei, **non potevi essere altrimenti cheavarissimo.**
CLEAN. Io non so che avaro: so bene che chi non ha roba a questo tempo è reputato una bestia.
DULIP. Egli ha detto che **tu sei fastidioso et ostinato sopra tutti gli altrì**, e **che tu la farai consumare d'affanno.**
CLEAN. O uomo maligno!
DULIP. **E che di e notte non fai altro che tossire e sputare, e che li porci averieno schifo di te.**
CLEAN. Io non tosso, né sputo pur mai. Uòh, uòh, uòh ... È vero che io sono adesso un poco infreddato; ma chi non è di questo tempo?
DULIP. E dice molto peggio: **che ti puzzano li piedi e le ascelle e, più che 'l resto, il fiato.**
CLEAN. O traditore! al corpo ch’io ...
DULIP. **E che tu sei aperto di sotto, e che ti pende fino alle ginocchia una borsa più grossa che tu non hai la testa.**
CLEAN. Non abbia mai cosa ch’io voglia, s’io non ne lo pago. Ei mente per la gola di ciò che e’ dice: s’io non fussi qui ne la via, ti farei vedere il tutto.
DULIP. **E che tu la domandi più per voglia che hai di marito, che di moglie.**
CLEAN. Che vuol per questo inferire?
DULIP. Che non tale ésca vorresti tirarti li giovani a casa.
CLEAN. Li giovani a casa io? A che effetto?
DULIP. **Che tu patisci una certa infermità, a cui giova et è apropriato rimedio lo stare con li giovani di prima barba.**
CLEAN. Può fare Iddio, ch’egli abbia dette queste cose?
DULIP. Altre infine; e non pur questa, ma molte e molte altre fiate ancora. (II.3, emphasis added)

The exaggerated description of Cleandro’s personal hygiene and his hernia is in line with the Bakhtinian theory of the grotesque realism. Apparently, Cleandro’s hygiene is so low that even pigs are disgusted by it; and, Cleandro’s hernia is so large that it reaches his knees. The false Dulippo (Erostrato) also accuses the elderly Cleandro of sodomy, which in the Renaissance was considered to be a most sinful act and one that could lead to a severe punishment. 214 By depicting Cleandro’s unbearable bodily stench, the abnormal size of his hernia, and Cleandro’s sodomitical sexuality, Ariosto not only derides and degrades this particular character, but also mocks and debases the social custom of his days that encourages and even fosters marriages between people who are incompatible not only in age, but also in manners and desires. This criticism of incompatible marriages demonstrated so vividly in *I Suppositi* echoes well with Ariosto’s personal views on marriages communicated in the *Satire V*. Ariosto composed this satire for his cousin Annibale Malaguzzi advising him to choose the future bride carefully. In his view, a man cannot perfect himself without a wife. A man, therefore, should not delay the decision of getting married since in old age he might not be physically capable to consummate his marriage, which would lead him first to not being able to produce legitimate heirs, and then, worse still, to risk becoming a cuckold. To be fully satisfied with his marriage, a man should find an average looking wife with moderate cognitive capacity and, most importantly, a woman not with a higher socio-economical status than his own. 215 While these precepts reflect the inferior status of sixteenth-century women evident in the fact that these women are voiceless and wait to be chosen by their future spouses, they nonetheless highlight Ariosto’s criticism of the marriage

214 According to the statutes, the punishment for sodomy was death on the pyre. For condemnation of sodomy, see Werner L. Gundersheimer, “Crime and Punishment in Ferrara, 1440-1500,” 104-128; Chambers and Dean, *Clean Hands and Rough Justice an Investigating Magistrate in Renaissance Italy*, 19-56; For the situation in Florence, see Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*.

arrangements present in his own society, where men marry women that are much younger than themselves and seek them out from much wealthier families that their own. It seems obvious that in formulating his precepts Ariosto relied on his analysis and observations of sixteenth-century mores, customs, and habits.

To emphasize this social critique, in *Il Negromante* Ariosto has the female servant Fantesca act as a spokesperson against the tradition of arranged marriages. Although her speech is richly suffused with obscene and indecent references in line with the carnivalesque spirit, it nonetheless highlights the issues present in arranged marriages.

MAD. Confortati, figliuola, che rimedio, 
   fuor ch’al morire, ad ogni cosa truovano 
   le savie donne. Or resta in pace. —Ah misera 
   umana vita! a quanti strani e insoliti 
   casi è suggetto questo nostro vivere!
FANT. In fè di Dio, che tòr non si dovrebbono 
   se non a pruova li mariti.
MAD. Ah bestia!
FANT. Che bestia? Io dico il ver. Mai non si compera 
   cosa, che prima ben non si consideri 
   dentro e di fuor più volte. Se in un semplice 
   fuso il vostro danaio avete a spendere, 
   dieci volte a guardarlo bene e volgere 
   per man tornate: et a barlume gli uomini 
   si torran poi, che tanto ci bisognano?
MAD. Credo che sii ubriaca.
FANT. Anzi più sobria 
   unqua non fui. Io conobbi una savia, 
   già mia vicina, che si tenne un giovane 
   ogni notte nel letto più di sedici 
   mesi, e ne fece ogni pruova possibile; 
   e poi che a tal mestier ben le parve utile, 
   de la figliuola sua, ch’ella aveva unica, 
   lo fè’ marito.
MAD. Va, scrofa, e vergognati.
FANT. Dunque mi debb’io vergognare a dirve la 
   verità? S’anco voi la esperïenzia 
   fatta aveste di Cintio, a questo termine 
   ne sareste. Ma che più? Persuadetevi 
   che sia tutto uno, poi che esperïenzia 
   n’ha fatto Emilia tanti di. Lasciatelo 
   in sua mala ventura, e d’altro genero 
   provedetevi. Ma prima provatelo:
Seeing that Madonna’s daughter Emilia has not consummated her marriage due to her husband’s impotence, the servant Fantesca advises Madonna to find another son-in-law. To make sure that the new son-in-law is fully capable of sexual intercourse with the opposite sex, Fantesca suggests Madonna try him out personally or let the servant test him. While Fantesca’s salacious advice ridicules and degrades the tradition of arranged marriages, it points to the issues present in such marriages. Since arranged marriages were predominantly contracted in an attempt to consolidate or increase the wealth of both families, the age difference between bride and groom, personal preferences, and even the sexual orientation of future spouses were all generally ignored. By letting the female servant openly deride the arranged marriage between Emilia and Cintio, Ariosto expresses his discontent with the practice of arranged marriages current in his day.

In I Studenti, the use of obscene and indecent references is not directed at an older generation’s desire to use the younger generation for sexual purposes and satisfaction, but at the sexual intentions of youth, instead. In this play, sexual billingsgate is again placed in the mouth of a working class person, in this case a female servant whose obscenities disclose an intimate relationship between the false Flamminia and Eurialo and deride the lascivious and immoral behaviour of young and wealthy males.

In her conversation with Claudio and Bonifazio, the servant Stanna informs them that her young master Eurialo is intimately involved with the lawyer’s daughter Flamminia. When Claudio asks whether Eurialo is home or not, Stanna answers that he might have reached Figarolo, or have gone beyond Garofalo to Pelosella.

Claudio

È in casa?
Stanna E dove può star meglio?

Bonifazio Detto ci
avevi ch’era ito in villa.

Stanna Pote essere 
ch’a Figarolo, o di là da Garofalo 
or sia, alla Pelosella...

Claudio Per Dio, mandala 
via, ch’ella mi distrugge! (II.5, emphasis added)

Stanna’s answer conveys an ambiguous meaning: at a literal level the response refers to nearby towns and points out that Figarolo is located in the opposite direction from Garofalo and Pelosella, thus sketching out a triangle of possible geographical locations for Eurialo; at a suggestive level, however, the names of these towns outline a geography that recalls “nothing else than the female anatomy and points out the amorous progress of Eurialo with his beloved.”

Figarolo, the name of an island off the coast of Sardinia, contains the Italian obscene word for the female organ (figa), while Pelosella, a purposefully mispronounced name for the town of Polesella in the Veneto region near the city of Rovigo, contains the obscene word for pubic hair (pelo). The sexual innuendo in Garofalo is clearly present as well. In the Renaissance, the bride and groom exchanged carnations (garofano, from Latin caryophyllus) during marriage as a vow of fidelity, so by extension the term can be used as an allusion to the consummation of marriage. By enriching the female servant’s speech with obscene references, Ariosto makes this play reflect the carnival spirit that allows a servant to speak what is on her mind, albeit in allusive language.

In La Lena, the use of obscene and indecent allusions, especially by the servant Corbolo, accentuates the various immoralities of the procurress Lena. For instance, when Lena asks Flavio whether he has the money to pay for the night tryst with Licinia, Corbolo replies with an indecent suggestion:

LEN A O che guadagno! Dimmi, Flavio: 
hai tu quella faccenda?
C OR B. Ben puoi credere 
che non saria venuto, non avendola.

Vi so dir che l’ha bella e bene in ordine.
LENA Non gli dico di quella; ma domandogli s’egli arreca danar. (I.2, emphasis added)

Corbolo purposefully misinterprets “faccenda” to mean not the money Lena is asking for, but the organ necessary for Flavio’s pleasure tryst with Licinia, and then develops the obscene allusion by confirming that he has seen it and can vouch for its size and efficiency. When Flavio promises to pay Lena later and asks her to trust him, Corbolo again intervenes in the dialogue with another obscene double entendre:

FLAV. Tu temi ch’io te la freghi?
CORB. Sì, fregala, padron, che poi ti sarà più piacevole. (I.2, emphasis added)

Corbolo’s play on words on the verb *fregare* (to cheat, but also to rub a woman sexually) is not only obscene, but also sexist. His comment concludes by suggesting that once Lena has been brought manually to orgasm she will be much better disposed to grant Flavio an extension on his payment.

Lena is also not averse to sexual innuendos. When she learns that Flavio has been delivered in a wine casket to Fazio’s house, she runs to the house in order to prevent Flavio from meeting with Licinia. Once in the house, Lena realizes that Fazio’s servant Menica—who is about to prepare dinner for her master’s family—might obstruct her plan. She thus quickly decides to send Menica on an errand away from the house. Before leaving, Menica asks Lena to finish preparing the meat and to start cooking it, to which Lena lewdly replies that the meat (that is, Licinia) is not going to be cooked (that is, sexually used by Flavio) until she first receives her twenty-five florins:

MEN. La carne è nel catin lavata, e in ordine; non resta se non porla ne la pentola.
LENA Troppo cred’io ch’ella sia ben in ordine; ma non è già per porla ne la pentola se ventincinque fiorin non mi numera. Conosco io ben l’amor di questi giovani, che dura solamente fin che bramano aver la cosa amata, e spenderebbono, mentre che stanno in questo desiderio,
non che l’aver, ma il cuor. Fa che possegghino:
va l’amor come il fuoco, che spargendovi
de l’acqua sopra, suol subito spegnersi:
e mancato l’ardor, non ti darebbono
di mille l’uno, che già ti promesseno.
Per questo voglio ir dentro, et interrompere
s’alcuna cosa senza me disegnano.
Corbolo, or su, spàcciati tosto, arrecali
alcuna veste; che lo possian mettere
fuor, mentre l’agio ci abbiamo.
CORB. Anzi, pregoti,
mentre abbiamo agio, fa che possa mettere
dentro, e dategli luogo tu e Pacifico. (IV.9, emphasis added)

Both Corbolo’s and Lena’s sexually allusive billingsgate speech suggest an element of criticism, on Ariosto’s part, of lascivious behaviour by members of both the higher and lower classes.

The analysis of the obscene and indecent expressions in Ariosto’s plays demonstrates that billingsgate speech served a double function for Ariosto. While it highlights the lascivious behaviour of people from all walks of life, it also serves to voice Ariosto’s criticism of traditional marriage practices, of the inferior status of women in sixteenth-century society, and of immoral behaviour in general.

b) Conclusion

The analysis of billingsgate speech—as outlined by Mikhail Bakhtin in his theory of carnival—is clearly a useful approach to examine Ariosto’s plays. It serves to demonstrate that Ariosto intentionally enriched his plays with this type of carnivalesque language consisting of abusive phrases, cursing, insults, indecent expressions, and obscene allusions in order not only to entertain his audience, but also to critique human foibles and thus, in a subtle way, to reform contemporary society. Ariosto’s social critique thus touches on various aspects of Ferrarese society that the dramatist found particularly wanting—the immoral behaviour of youths, the practice of arranged marriages with the resulting incompatibility between the spouses, the inferior status of women at the time, and the poor, if not desperate, living conditions of the lower class. By engaging in this manner with contemporary social issues, Ariosto was taking a clear stand in favour of social reform and using what might at first appear to be mere imitation of
classical sources and structures as a way to reach out to an audience and, in so doing, to use theatre as a tool for social reform. The carnivalesque language of his plays, and in particular the freedom that billingsgate speech allowed him to exercise, served to point out the weaknesses of the social system and, for a carnivalesque moment, to turn the world upside-down in a very effective proto-Bakhtinian manoeuvre.
Conclusion

The comprehensive examination of Ariosto’s five plays carried out in this dissertation has uncovered many significant and overlooked facts about them. While analysing the structure, style, and content of Ariosto’s plays (including alterations and revisions made by Ariosto himself) the first chapter has revealed that Ariosto composed the plays in line with the ancient Roman comedies of Plautus and Terence. Similar to classical models, Ariosto’s plays are divided into five acts, with a clear division into protasis, epitasis, and catastrophe; they also respect the three unities of action, time, and place; moreover, they use classical comic devices and effects such as substitutions or exchange of identity, unexpected arrivals, trickery, and ruse. However, to go beyond merely reproducing ancient Roman plays in Italian for sixteenth-century audiences, Ariosto masterfully enriched his plays with many subtle allusions to previous Italian literature, such as the medieval novella tradition, and added clear references to contemporary events and customs. All his plays portray the life of well-to-do merchants and their servants, reveal recurrent problems between disobedient young sons and daughters and their fathers, or between untrustworthy servants and their masters. Furthermore, the plays are peppered with references to recent historical and political events that affected the living conditions of people in his time. All these innovations demonstrate not only Ariosto’s intention to free his plays from classical models, but also his attempt to help to develop the ‘learned’ or ‘erudite’ comedy in sixteenth-century Italy.

The immediate success of *La Cassaria*, first staged during the carnival season of 1508, inspired Ariosto to compose his other plays. All his subsequent plays, except for the incomplete *l’Studenti*, were staged from 1508 to 1532 for a total of eleven times—ten times in Ferrara and once in Rome—and they all immensely entertained their spectators. Moreover, the availability of Ariosto’s plays in print and the subsequent critical analyses carried out by scholars and literary theorists throughout the centuries suggest that Ariosto’s attempt to liberate his plays from classical imitation and initiate the development of the learned comedy in Italy was not only successful, but also welcomed and praised by his contemporaries.
The application of Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of carnivalesque subversion to the comprehensive analysis of Ariosto’s plays carried out in the second and third chapters has uncovered additional new elements introduced by Ariosto. The examination of the actions of the servants and masters carried out in the first part of the second chapter through the prism of carnivalesque subversions and elements of grotesque realism has disclosed that the servants in Ariosto’s plays, though similar to their classical prototypes, display unique characteristics. Ignoring their social-economic status, the servants actually supervise their masters and substitute for them; moreover, they openly criticise, deride, and mock not only their masters, but also other members of society. These new characteristics enable them to establish a connection between the city and the court, the working and the ruling class, and the poor and the rich.

The lenses of carnivalesque subversion have revealed similar characteristics in the marginalised sector of society as it appears in Ariosto’s plays. In Il Negromante, the marginalised sector is represented by an exiled Jew while in La Lena by a married woman who is obliged to accept a lover because of her poverty. Just like the characters of the servants, new and very modern characters introduced by Ariosto into his comedies are able to give orders to, mock, and degrade the members of the wealthier classes.

Further analysis of Ariosto’s plays in line with Bakhtin’s theory of carnival carried out in the final part of the second chapter has identified various new functions and purposes intended in Ariosto’s plays. When the interaction between the servants and their masters and the interplay between the marginalised and the wealthy sectors of society are viewed and interpreted through the spectrum of carnivalesque subversion, they reveal Ariosto’s hidden agenda, that is, his intention not only to entertain, but also to critique his society in order to expose the rampant corruption present in it and then to begin the process of reforming it.

In the third chapter, the analysis of the carnival language in Ariosto’s plays carried out by applying Bakhtin’s theory of billingsgate speech as a type of carnivalesque subversion has shown that Ariosto purposefully and intentionally saturated his plays with abusive, insulting, and cursing words, and even peppered them with indecent and obscene expressions while transgressing social-economic hierarchical boundaries imposed by the ruling class. He did so not only in order to align his plays with carnival spirit and, in so doing, arouse carnivalesque laughter, but also in order to voice his social critique of many aspects of Ferrarese society.
The close examination of Ariosto’s plays through the prism of Bakhtin’s theory of carnival has revealed that they represent a significant and distinct contribution to sixteenth-century Italian drama and to our understanding of Ariosto’s intentions. They serve not only as a transition between the two worlds, ancient Rome and sixteenth-century Ferrara, or as a reflection of sixteenth-century Italian society, its life, customs, and mores, but also as an exposé of its foibles, vices, and immorality. Most importantly, once viewed through the prism of Bakhtin’s theory of carnival, it becomes clear that Ariosto’s plays served as a subtle but efficient means to entertain, critique, and reform Italian society.

The application of Bakhtin’s theory of carnival, which had never been carried out in an analysis of Ariosto’s comedies, has helped to decode Ariosto’s much more subtle intentions in his plays and the significance of their carnivalesque atmosphere. Such an approach might well prove to be as fruitful in a re-examination of Ariosto’s other literary works, in particular his epic poem Orlando furioso, since it might bring to light new subtle aspects in this work, as well—but that analysis is beyond the scope of the present work.
Bibliography


